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"I, REGINALD ROTH, DO HEREBY SOLEMNLY VOW THAT I WILL IN GOOD TIME TAKE THEE, BEATRIX RUTHERFORD, TO BE MY WEDDED WIFE."

LORD ROTH'S SIN;

Or, BETROTHED AT THE CRADLE.

BY GEORGINA DICKENS.

CHAPTER I.

THE BETROTHAL.

THE leaves were being whirled off the trees in

rapid succession, and scattered by the north wind. Already the lawns and paths of the Reedes were strewn; even the flower-beds were covered, although that very morning Job Hathaway—under gardener to Squire Rutherford—had spent an hour sweeping and gathering the russet-tinted leaves into neat piles under the laurels.

Job surveyed the wholesale disorder with the exemplary patience for which his namesake is

famed. Then he looked at the distant form of his master on the terrace.

"I don't believe he would care if the garden was turned into a howling wilderness to-morrow!" said Job, not unkindly.

His remark was infinitely true. Squire Rutherford took all the minor evils, the smaller inconveniences, of this life in an easy and happy sort of fashion peculiarly his own.

This gusty afternoon he was walking up and down the laurel walk arm in arm with his friend Lord Roth. The two were talking amicably, as men who had a liking for each other's company. In their walk they passed and repassed the open drawing-room window. Within the room sat two ladies and an elderly gentleman. The former were Lady Roth and Mrs. Rutherford, the latter was the Reverend Mr. Carlyle, rector of Rothbury, and father of Mrs. Rutherford.

Two months ago Lady Roth had presented to her husband a son and heir. Within a fortnight of that event a daughter had been born at the Reedes. The children were the first-born of the two houses; it was to celebrate their baptism that the families had dined together to-day.

There was a careless happiness in Squire Rutherford's face and manner which even affected his walk. He was fair-haired and pleasant-voiced. The expression on his handsome face was candor and unsuspicion—too much so of the latter. Incapable of any thing mean or base himself, the Squire was slow to see such in others. He was open-handed, too, and the veriest impostors found an easy prey in the good-natured gentleman.

Perhaps circumstances had conduced to this happy state of mind. At twenty-five years of age, Adrian Rutherford had found himself the fortunate possessor of the wide stretch of meadow and forest-land before him. That grand domain, with its manor-house, and its deer-haunted glades known as Free Chace—only divided from the Rothcourt property by a narrow stream—owned him as master. The more modern but elegant house and grounds called the Reedes were his also. Here he chose to reside, while for Free Chace he had found a tenant in the wealthy member for the county, Sir Dalrymple Dare.

Adjoining Free Chace lay Rothcourt. That, too, was a heritage of which any man might be proud. Between Rothcourt and the Reedes lay the village of Rothbury, almost every house and farm of which belonged to the lord of Rothcourt. Reginald, the present Lord Roth, was a few years older than the young Squire. He was taller, too, and very dark, with black hair, crisp and curly, black eyes, and a heavy mustache which covered the weak, undecided, yet beautiful mouth. The face was a handsome one, in spite of a certain sinister expression that it wore at times; and beneath the olive skin the color would flash with every changing passion of the unquiet heart. Lord Roth's was not the disposition to gain the wide and loyal love of all about him, as the Squire had done, but his face was one to haunt a woman's "nightly dreams and waking fancies."

Slacking their pace, the two men at length came to a stand-still. The scene before them was a fair one, seen in the light of the late October day.

"Do you remember our adventure in that old elm tree, Roth?" asked the young Squire, laughing, and pointing to the dismantled trunk of an ancient tree some distance off. "How firm was our conviction that it contained a magpie's nest!"

"I remember; and how cruelly we were deceived! You narrowly escaped breaking your neck. That is like you: to this day you are ready to rush head-long into any scrape, and then repent at leisure," was the amused reply.

"How short a time it seems since that afternoon when we made our first attempt at partridge-shooting in your father's preserves!"

The words of an old song floated on the breeze in the Squire's clear baritone, with just a tinge of

sadness in them, such as a past and pleasant memory recalls.

"Yes; and now I have a son and you a daughter," said Lord Roth, thoughtfully. "Come, Adrian, let us go in."

There was a shade of pomposity in his voice whenever he spoke of his son. No one could ever know the depth of love in that man's heart for his little child.

"And if your son should wed my daughter—"

"Why, what a wedding there will be!"

sung the Squire, in light-hearted, careless tones.

Lord Roth looked at him quickly. It was not the first time that this thought had occurred to him; and it was a pleasant thought for many reasons. But he spoke quite coolly—even lightly.

"It is just possible they might, Adrian—particularly if they were led to suppose that we were against any such thing. Young people usually make a point of falling in love against their parents' wishes."

"So they do, Roth. But, seriously, should such a thing come to pass, I should not know how to be thankful enough. It would be a closer bond than ever between us, old fellow."

"What a girl you are, Adrian!" said Lord Roth, the shadow of a smile on his mobile lips. "You, at least, are unchanged with the lapse of years."

"That is a doubtful compliment," laughed the other, as they entered the drawing-room.

The ladies were engaged in quiet talk, Mrs. Rutherford holding her baby on her knee. The Rector, having partaken bountifully of the Squire's old port had fallen asleep in an arm-chair.

"Rose, we have been hatching a plot worthy of Machiavel," said the Squire, gayly, and seating himself as he spoke by his wife. "This and another little bit of finery are in process of time to become devoted lovers, and eventually the reigning sovereigns of Rothbury, and owners of the united lands and revenues of Rothcourt and Free Chace."

The lady turned her pretty, inquiring face to Lord Roth.

"Seriously, yes," he said, smiling. "My dear Mrs. Rutherford, we only await your sanction to perform the ceremony of betrothal."

He addressed himself to the Squire's wife, utterly ignoring Lady Roth, whose meek and quiet face was turned toward him.

"They are to be the modern Paul and Virginia, Romeo and Juliet, or any other devoted pair you may choose to name," supplemented the Squire. "Come, Lady Ellen, give us your support. Why, where is Romeo?"

"He is with his nurse," replied Lady Roth quietly.

"But I do not understand what all this is about," observed Mrs. Rutherford.

"Only a little plot, the *denouement* of which is to give general joy and satisfaction," returned her husband, ringing the bell. "Tell Mrs. Kenn to bring the child," he said to the servant who answered his ring.

In a very short time Lady Roth's nurse entered with the little heir. She was a young woman, with a dark and beautiful face—an Irish face of almost perfect loveliness. Her glossy black hair was gathered in rippling coils beneath a coquettish widow's cap. Her blue eyes—mostly lowered beneath their long lashes—were apt to glance quickly at things and people about her. This was Mrs. Kenn, partly maid to Lady Roth, partly head nurse to her child, and esteemed by her gentle mistress invaluable in both capacities.

The "ceremony" proved more troublesome than either gentleman could have foreseen. Mrs. Rutherford, half-amused, half-distracted, held her baby daughter, and Mrs. Kenn the little heir of Rothcourt, while the laughter-loving Squire joined the children's hands, and Lord Roth said, with mock solemnity:

"I, Reginald Roth, do hereby solemnly vow that

I will in good time take thee, Beatrix Rutherford, to be my wedded wife; in token whereof I plight thee my troth."

Then Squire Rutherford, amid sundry explosions of laughter, registered on behalf of the said Beatrix Rutherford—who shrieked lustily meanwhile—a similar solemn vow to take Reginald Roth—at present aged three months—to be her wedded husband at some future time.

Both children cried furiously. Mrs. Kenn soothed the little heir with cooing murmurs. Mrs. Rutherford endeavored to quiet her daughter.

"It's over," said Lord Roth, resigning the boy to his nurse. "What do you say to that piece of business, Mrs. Rutherford?"

"No, it is not over," interrupted the Squire. "The deed is not signed. See here."

He seated himself at the davenport, and wrote on a slip of blue paper:

"I, Adrian Rutherford, do give and bequeath to Reginald, son of Lord Roth, of Rothcourt, in the event of his marriage with my daughter, Beatrix Rutherford, the whole of the property known as Free Chace, in the village of Rothbury, as the said Beatrix's dowry."

"There," he said, triumphantly, handing the paper to Lord Roth, "that will make one property of the two estates."

Lord Roth laughed carelessly, saying:

"If this were given to any one but me, you might rue the day you wrote it. How easily you could be duped, old fellow!"

"Don't imagine that I am so simple, Roth. There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. Think of the ills these little bits of humanity are heirs to, and of the perils of infancy; and even supposing that they weather all these, there is a possibility that both may bestow their hearts in other directions—whereupon the deed is null and void."

"Very well put," said the other, coolly. "You have missed your vocation, Adrian. Both in pleading causes and writing deeds you excel, *mon ami*."

"I think, too, that I still retain a boyish affection for any scheme embracing a certain amount of risk," rejoined Mr. Rutherford, offering Lord Roth his cigar-case. "Come, Roth, let us smoke another cigar in the billiard-room while my wife orders coffee."

As Lord Roth crossed the spacious hall in the wake of his friend, he quietly folded and placed in his breast-pocket the slip of blue paper with the Squire's signature.

CHAPTER II.

THE FATHER'S AMBITION.

IN the somber library of Rothcourt Hall its master sat late at night, alone. The wax tapers lit up the dreary gloom of the apartment, with its quaint and massive furniture and tapestry hangings; without, the autumn wind moaned drearily. The hour was late, the fire burnt low, yet Lord Roth still sat by the open desk, anon rising to pace with slow and measured tread the length of the room. He was thinking of something deeply, intently—something of absorbing interest.

For two generations past the Roths of Rothcourt had led dissipated lives. The late Lord Roth—whose wild career, reckless gambling, and revelings had reduced his heritage almost to nothing—had, dying, left his son only the barren honor of the title, with the lands of Rothcourt deeply mortgaged to the furthest acre. On his deathbed he told his son that a wealthy marriage would yet save the young man's honor and the heritage he held so dear. Looking back upon his own wasted life with feelings of deep remorse, he conjured his son to wed a wealthy bride for his own honor, and to save himself from the shame of the beggary and ruin that seemed inevitable.

Later Reginald Roth remembered his parent's

words, and resolved to act upon them. Fortune seemed to favor him. Six months after his father's death he met his cousin, Charlotte Berney, for the first time. She had a handsome fortune, and a face that, had she been any one else, would have proved too fair for Reginald's peace. He loved her with the passionate love that it was his nature to give, and, having once given it, gave it forever. She returned it, and these two—so singularly fitted for each other—were betrothed.

Had things gone on well, Reginald Roth would have been a good man—a good master to his tenants, an honorable gentleman in his generation. He was not bad by nature, but became so by circumstances. Things were ordered differently. An adverse fate appeared in the shape of Philip Haughton, Lord Roth's only cousin on his father's side, and, after him, heir to Rothcourt should Reginald die without heirs.

Between these two had ever existed a bitter animosity. As schoolboys they had been rivals, and in almost every case Philip Haughton had been victorious over Reginald Roth. Philip was handsome, carelessly clever, and of an easy, complaisant manner, terribly irritating to one so high-spirited as Lord Roth. He was wealthy too on his father's side, and the desire of his heart was to possess the title to which he had so near a claim. He loved Charlotte Berney in his careless fashion, but he hated Reginald deeply. When these two were engaged, he too was spending the autumn at Stainwolde, the seat of the Berneys, and he set himself to work mischief between them.

It was an easy task. Like most passionate natures, Reginald Roth was terribly jealous, and Charlotte had many admirers. Philip worked cleverly, and the fruit of his treachery was a quarrel between the two lovers. Reginald gave way to jealous rage, Charlotte was proud, and they parted.

Lord Roth spent that Christmas at the house of a friend in Devonshire. Here he met a young lady who was deemed an heiress—the only child of a wealthy merchant. Knowing that he must marry for money, and quite indifferent as to whom he married, Lord Roth made her his wife. Scarcely was the honeymoon over when tidings reached him of the death of his wife's father, and close upon it the frightful disclosure that he had died a bankrupt. Reginald Roth, to his unutterable horror, found himself united to a penniless woman, for whom he had not a particle of affection. He said never a word, but his indifference to his meek wife soon grew into positive dislike.

A bitterer day was in store for Lord Roth. By some means Philip's treachery became known to him. Of the anguish of this awakening Lord Roth never after dared to think.

Looking back upon all that he had lost—love, happiness, and wealth—he swore a sacred oath.

"My cousin Philip shall never have Rothcourt—he shall never bear my name—not if I perjure my soul to keep it from him!" he said to his own heart; and he kept his vow.

No marvel that the proud and unhappy man's brow was shaded by the weight of his sorrow. If he was faulty, he was unfortunate. His love for his child was of the most intense nature. His own life, his hopes, his peace of mind were all blighted—his aspirations for the future were centered in his child. He had now an heir to his father's name and to the burdened property, which, by dint of almost impossible scheming, might be preserved. Above all, the child was another barrier between Philip Haughton and Rothcourt.

To-night, as he sat in his solitary room, he took from the drawer of the escritoire the paper which the Squire had given him in a moment of thoughtless mirth.

"This would save it—my boy's heritage," he murmured, passionately. "This would secure it to him free and unfettered, as I might have secured it had I not been mad. If it might be so! Yes—it shall be

so. Yet, Adrian is my friend. Am I then never to have one desire gratified? My son, my little child, is there any sacrifice I would not make for your sake?"

But oh, the long, long years before this fond wish could be realized—the years of meager existence, of battling with poverty and debt.

"Oh Heaven, if he should die!" he thought, as he locked the paper in his secret drawer, and with the thought cold drops of perspiration chased each other down his brow, and his very lips grew white. No marvel that the proud man's head was bowed beneath the weight of his secret sorrow and the sting of his bitter poverty. If the dream he was cherishing was to lead him into sin, his hard fate was a little to blame as well as his own weakness.

CHAPTER III.

RACHEL.

BEFORE Charlotte Berney knew and loved her cousin Reginald Roth—before his meek wife gave her tender heart into his keeping—some one else loved him with a love deeper, fiercer and more adoring than he dreamed of. It was a very sweet and beautiful dream that lay in Rachel Flaherty's heart—a dream which she adorned with delicious fancies and never-to-be-realized visions floating in her romantic brain. She was the daughter of an Irish farmer on the Rothcourt estate, and she hoped to be Reginald Roth's wife.

It was a strange and daring hope, but she was young, innocent and foolish—not more so, perhaps, than others have been before her, and will be again so long as this world of imperfect humanity continues. There was some excuse for her—he had given her grounds for the hope. In the listless, idle days before his father's death, Reginald found time hang heavy on his hands. He admired the young Irish girl as he admired everything that was beautiful and natural, until the dark ending of his life's romance made him indifferent and callous to all the tender emotions belonging to youth long before his own youth was past.

So, he had dallied after Rachel Flaherty's footsteps, to whisper fond words in her ear. He had been wont to honor her dairy with his presence, watching every movement of the rounded arms and graceful form with undisguised admiration in his lustrous eyes. He had kissed her once or twice, unmindful of the rapture in her downcast eyes. To him it was an hour's play, forgotten as soon as ended.

But Rachel did not forget. The first cloud in her sky was a short visit paid by Miss Berney and her father to Rothcourt. Then followed a period of bitter suffering, in the midst of which came the tidings of Lord Roth's marriage.

The day he brought his wife to Rothcourt she watched, from a wicket gate where he had often been wont to meet her in the past springtime, that for Rachel had been the brightest, gladdest spring in all her life, the carriage which contained the newly-married pair. She looked at him as he passed—herself unseen—and, although her heart was sick and sore, a strange bitterness rose in it, making her face flush, and her hands tighten their grasp on the rail by which she stood.

"He has won my love but to cast it from him," she thought, fiercely; "now my hate shall work him woe!"

Beautiful Rachel Flaherty had many admirers, and the next thing she did was to marry the bailiff. Why she did so she scarcely knew. During the few months that she was a wife she scarcely thought of her husband; she was thinking always of the man who had wronged her—wild and, at times, horrible thoughts. She told herself that she hated him, but she thought of him day and night.

When they brought her husband home dead—killed by a fall from his horse—she did not shed a tear. People thought she felt more deeply than

she allowed the world to see, but, in reality, she did not feel his death at all. When her baby was born, it seemed to her that he resembled Lord Roth. For that reason she was doubly fond of the child. She was, however, obliged to maintain him; so, leaving him in charge of her widowed mother, she secured the post of maid to Lady Roth and head nurse to her child. Some fascination drew her near to Reginald Roth and his wife. True, she did not like the lady with the childish face and gentle voice, but she was willing to wait upon her.

On the afternoon following the children's betrothal she sat by the glowing fire in the pleasant day-nursery at Rothcourt. In her lap lay the little heir, asleep. A strange smile played upon her lips as she turned over in her imaginative mind the events of the preceding day.

Opposite to her sat the under-nurse at needle-work. Behind Rachel was a door communicating with Lord Roth's dressing-room. It was closed, but the sound of footsteps moving about on the carpeted floor was plainly heard by the two women. They were Lord Roth's footsteps—he was dressing for dinner. Hearing the child cry, he opened the door and came into the nursery.

"What is the matter with the young Turk, Rachel?" he asked, gayly.

He took the boy from Rachel's lap and held him in his arms.

He played with his boy for a few minutes, and then restored him to Mrs. Kenn. Her hand—small and white as a lady's—lay an instant upon his as she took the child, but it touched no chord in his heart—awoke within him no memory of the time when he had held that same hand closely within his clasp. He stooped and kissed the boy's dimpled cheeks, and the perfume of his glossy locks was wafted in her face. Then he went out of the room, leaving the dressing-room door ajar.

Eunice Mills looked after him with open admiration upon her ruddy face.

"How fond his lordship seems of the little fellow!" she said, as the sound of Lord Roth's footsteps died away.

"Yes, but I wonder if it will last," was the reply, spoken slowly.

Eunice was a young servant—years after, when she was housekeeper in this same house, Rachel's words returned to her with strange significance. She looked up from her darning.

"Last?" she uttered. "Why should it not last?"

"Oh, I don't know—men's love is short-lived," was the listless answer. "Love one day, forgetfulness the next."

Her bright eyes were bent upon the fire.

"Oh, he's not like that, Mrs. Kenn," said Eunice, incredulously.

"Isn't he?" replied Rachel, with a half smile. "Why, child, though he is Lady Ellen's husband, I have seen him make love to another lady—ay, and look at her with eyes that seemed to say the earth was not good enough for her to tread or the air for her to breathe."

"Have you really?" said Eunice, interested.

"Who was it, Mrs. Kenn?"

"His cousin, Miss Charlotte Berney," answered Rachel.

"Why didn't he marry her then?" was Eunice's natural question.

"Why?" returned Rachel sharply. "Don't I tell you that it's love one day, and forgetfulness the next, with them all?"

Eunice appeared incredulous. She was "keeping company" with the footman, and this was a very dismal prospect. Suddenly she lifted her head.

"What is it?" asked Rachel.

"I thought I heard some one in there," said Eunice, pointing to the dressing-room.

"Get up and see."

The girl obeyed. No—the room was empty. She shut the door and sat down with an expression of relief.

"Suppose my lady had heard us?" she whispered. Mrs. Kenn appeared quite unruffled even by this supposition.

"My lady," had heard. She was locked in her bedroom now, trying to do battle with her fierce pain. The half-bitter, half-scornful words she had heard fall from Rachel Kenn's lips told her a new tale. Had her husband loved his cousin once? If so, did he love her still, and was he her husband only in name?

She fought against the terrible idea. In spite of his coldness to her she had fondly believed that in his heart he loved her, else why had he chosen her for his wife? She had never wronged him by thinking that he had any other motive for wedding her. Now all seemed to be changed—a new light was thrown upon many things. The coldness she had held to be his manner was in reality the true nature of his feelings for her. He had loved before—he had been disappointed in his love—and he had married her because—

Why? The reason baffled her. She loved her husband; he had lifted her from her lower estate; he had given her a title, and made her a wife. Should she not in return give him her love?

The tears gathered in her eyes, and fell hot and fast upon her costly dress, as her thoughts went back with a deep, ineffable yearning to her girlhood's happy home, before Lord Roth came into her life. Ah! never in all her wedded life had the gloomy splendor of Rothcourt given her so light a heart as the old home where the merchant had let his daughter reign as queen. And now, as the autumn sun set, and the shadows grew dark and numerous in her chamber, the last gleam of sunlight went out of her life, leaving it dark and cold and dreary forever.

"Oh, my boy, my darling boy!" she cried, in her despair; "you love me. I have only you in all the world; nothing shall part us but death—nothing!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHILD LOVERS.

THERE had been a shower, and the hedge-rows, in all the glory of spring-tide verdure, were drooping beneath their weight of crystal drops. The orchard trees were laden with blossom, and in the well-trimmed beds of the Reedes, spring flowers were in full bloom; everything looked fresh and fair.

The shower was quite over. On the terrace steps stood Mrs. Rutherford, regarding with a thoughtful face her little daughter, who was seated in a chair-saddle upon a diminutive Shetland pony, held by a groom, just in front of the steps.

Three years have elapsed, and, beyond a certain *embonpoint* and an expression of deeper gravity in her eyes, the Squire's wife is little changed. The bright color is still blooming in her cheek—the sweet smile lingers round the pleasant mouth. During these three years two more children have been born to Squire Rutherford.

Beatrix Rutherford sat her horse well for so young a child. Her proud little head was erect, her bridle daintily poised. Round her shoulders, and in contrast with her dark blue habit, hung the waving masses of her golden hair.

Presently the Squire, on his bay mare, rode round from the stables. He puckered up his handsome face as he criticised the clouds.

"The shower is over, I think," he said. "It is safe for Beattie to venture."

"Take care of her," returned the mother, fondly.

She watched them away, the Squire holding the child's leading-rein as they rode together through the village. His little daughter distributed her smiles freely to old and young. All Rothbury loved "Miss Beattie" as they loved her jovial father.

He was taking her to Rothcourt to pay a farewell visit to the little heir. The Roths were going abroad for a time; Lady Roth had been ailing during the

past winter, and her physician had ordered change of climate—Italy or the Mediterranean.

Riding up the avenue of elms that faced Rothcourt, the Squire and Beatrix met little Reginald with a nursemaid. Mr. Rutherford dismounted, and, lifting his daughter down, left her with her little friend, while he rode on to the house.

From the window of Lord Roth's private room the two gentlemen watched the children as they talked.

"So you are going to send the girl away, Adrian. What a dignified style she has of holding her head!" said Lord Roth, with an amused smile.

"You know of it, then? Yes, I am going to send her to my aunt Margaret, at Dijon. She is her god-mother, is wealthy and alone, and has begged earnestly to have the child, for a time at least; so we could scarcely refuse, although Rose and I have had a hard tug with our feelings. However, we console ourselves with the thought that it will be for Beatrix's good."

"For her good?" questioned Lord Roth.

"Why, yes. My aunt is very wealthy—she will give Beatrix a better dower than I could, after all. I have two more girls to provide for, Roth."

The Squire shrugged his shoulders. Lord Roth shot a covert glance at him from under the shade of his long lashes.

"She is a pretty little child," he said, slowly. "You are sorry to lose her?"

"Can you doubt it? But we could not let our love stand in the way of so great a benefit for Beattie. My aunt thinks a great deal of her," said Mr. Rutherford, fondly regarding the little figure in the blue riding-dress. "I may have a large family, you know, Roth, and I cannot shut my eyes to this advantage which good fortune has laid in my path."

Had the Squire forgotten a certain slip of blue paper which he had given his old friend three years or more ago? Lord Roth had not.

"I think they get on very well together—don't you?" he said, eagerly.

"The children? Oh, capitally! How tall your boy is—taller than Beattie, and we think her tall."

"Yes," said Lord Roth, regarding his son proudly. "He is a fine lad. I am glad I have no more boys."

Half an hour later, as the Squire mounted his horse, he glanced down at little Reginald Roth.

"Good-by, Reggy," he said kindly, bending from his saddle to place his hand on the curly head.

If he had only known of the changes that time would have wrought upon the sweet, sunny face before he saw it again!

The Squire and his little daughter rode away homeward side by side; and the gathering twilight hid the mist in Adrian Rutherford's blue eyes as he thought with wistful pain of the few rides that remained to him with his dearly loved little Beatrix.

Meanwhile the preparations were complete at Rothcourt for the Continental sojourn that was to restore Lady Roth to health. All the servants were dismissed save the steward and his wife, who were left in charge of Rothcourt, and Rachel Kenn, who was to accompany her mistress abroad.

It was the evening before the day appointed for the journey, and Rachel Kenn was bending over the wooden crib in which her boy lay asleep. It was a plain little crib, and the room containing it was simply and scantily furnished, although very clean. There was no tear in the young mother's eyes, but upon her lips was a yearning smile that lent an exquisite beauty to her face.

"Darling, darling," she murmured, in soft, musical tones—"my own love, good-by!"

The passionate murmur did not wake the child. He slept on calmly, one brown arm pillowing the head with its masses of shining dark hair, and on his olive cheek a tear. As she bent over him a sob quivered on his lips. It moved the mother's secret love.

"Dreaming of mother! Ah, darling, when you waken she'll be gone; but it is better so. Perhaps some day we shall meet again—some day not very far off."

She laid the bed-clothes straight and turned away, never pausing to look back. Down the well-scoured stairs she came, and into the little kitchen, where an elderly woman sat knitting by the fire.

Rachel advanced to the other side of the hearth, and bent her head upon the wooden mantelpiece. It was a very pale and serious face that the flame played upon.

"You will take care of Oliver?" she said, without moving.

"You know I'll cherish him as my own heart's core, Rachel," was the reply, in Mrs. Flaherty's richest brogue.

"And, mother, be sure I shall not forget to send you money for yourself and him regularly. Do not be troubled."

"Ye're a good daughter, Rachel. None could say that iver ye forgot your mother in her old age. I'll remember. Now, sit you here, and eat a little of this stew; it's splendid, and I'd be troubled to eat it all myself."

An hour later the two women parted. With slow and thoughtful footsteps Rachel returned to Rothcourt.

It was a fair and balmy day in spring when Lady Roth entered the carriage that was to convey her to the nearest station. Her maid and the luggage were already gone on. As the carriage drove away, Lady Roth turned her face toward the old Hall. She looked at the turrets that rose up fair against the sky—at the massive gates, at the pillars with the grotesque stone faces that adorned them. She looked at the pine wood that bounded the park—the dark pine wood where the wind wailed and sighed in low moans; she looked with a languid smile upon her face. It was her last look at Rothcourt!

CHAPTER V.

A REVELATION.

In the front chamber of a small but exquisitely-furnished villa overlooking the Bay of Mergellina, on the Mediterranean, sat Lady Roth before her mirror. The May sunset flashed upon the waters of the bay till they gleamed like fretted gold. In the garden beneath the window Lord Roth was laughing and playing with his little son; their voices could be heard distinctly. Beyond the grounds, which were bounded by a low white wall, lay a narrow stretch of golden sand washed by the waters of the little bay. A few fishing boats lay at anchor, and far off in the sunset the spires and pinnacles of Naples—which was scarcely five miles distant—were flashing in the gorgeous light.

Rachel Kenn was dressing her mistress's hair. Lord and Lady Roth were going to an evening assemblage at Naples. Lord Roth's scheme of economy had ended in his taking this small but costly home with a suitable staff of servants, and in his rather free indulgence in the pleasures of the best society in Naples. The life suited him—he was born to luxury.

As Rachel wove the brown hair into silken braids, her restless eyes cast swift glances through the window every now and then. Seated upon the gunwale of a boat that lay upon the sands was a young man mending a fishing-net. His clear-cut profile was distinct against the sky. His face was one of dark and sensual beauty. As he worked, he sung in a tenor voice of exquisite tone, the clear, rich notes sounding through the open window.

"If it were not for disappointing Lord Roth, I would not go to the palace to-night—I feel so strangely nervous and restless," said Lady Ellen, dreamily.

"Perhaps you will feel better when you arrive there, my lady," suggested Rachel, in the soothing tones of her musical voice.

Lady Roth's health had decidedly improved of late—she looked better, too—less thin and fragile.

"Still, I would rather remain at home. Lord Roth is anxious to go—he expects to meet his cousin, Miss Berney, whom he has not seen for some years."

Lady Ellen often talked of her private affairs with her maid—Mrs. Kenn stood high in her regard. There was a slight peculiarity of tone in Lady Ellen's voice as she spoke—an effort to speak with careless indifference which was patent to Rachel's sharp ears.

"No, his lordship has not seen Miss Berney for long," she said, musingly.

"You remember her, I suppose?" asked Lady Ellen, with that same assumption of carelessness.

"I don't think any one who had once seen Miss Berney could ever forget her, my lady."

"She was so beautiful?" asked the other, wistfully.

"Beautiful? (Will you hold your head a little higher, my lady, if you please?) Yes, she was very beautiful when I knew her—that was five years ago."

Rachel took a subtle glance at the mirror. She hated the childish face that it reflected. Her eyes came back to the brown braids with a quiet satisfaction. She was not sorry that the woman who had supplanted her should feel some of the pain she had suffered. She went on in unruffled tones:

"That was at Rothcourt, my lady. Miss Berney and her father were Lord Roth's guests for a short time then. Miss Berney used to ride and hunt with my master. They said no lady in the country rode like her. My master often called her 'Di Vernon.' Begging your pardon, my lady, people used to say she would be mistress of Rothcourt."

Another swift glance at the mirror. The shaft was telling—the face was white, the mouth still. With skillful fingers Mrs. Kenn fastened the gems above the forehead.

The conversation was interrupted by Lord Roth. He came in with a brighter look than he usually wore.

"I am very late, I fancy," he said. "I had almost forgotten the time, playing with the boy. What a romp he is, Ellen! Wait for me in the drawing-room, will you? I shall not be long."

He hastened to his dressing-room, and Lady Roth, having finished her toilet, descended the staircase and entered the drawing-room as one in a dream.

Some of this agony she had suffered once before. Time had softened the sharpness of it, although it had never healed the cruel wound. Now it was opened again. How should she bear it—how meet the woman to whom the first, best, and only love of her husband's manhood was given, and perhaps never recalled—given so openly that the very servants talked of it?

Lady Ellen was a meek woman, but a sensitive one, and her every nerve quivered with pain, while within her breast was born a feeling nearer akin to anger than she had ever felt; jealous anger it was, and sullen, as in people not easily provoked this passion is apt to be. She had long known that her husband did not love her, and now she was going to see the woman he had loved.

Her husband came in presently, and cried out at her ghastly face, but she laughed the subject off. He suggested that she should remain at home, in the cool, unruffled matter-of-fact tone he ever used to her, but she persisted in going. Not for worlds would she stay now that some fascination possessed her to go.

The twilight was gathering when she entered the carriage with her husband. The last thing she saw was her maid, Rachel Kenn, leaning over the low white wall, and talking to the young fisherman with the tenor voice.

There was silence during the long drive, but that was nothing unusual. Once Lady Ellen, looking at her husband's face, fancied it wore the same bright look as it had worn all day. When they reached the glittering mansion of the Neapolitan Minister,

the lights that flashed upon her showed a burning color in the usually pale face. There was a great crush, and presently a lady of their acquaintance offered her a seat. Lord Roth accepted it for her, and for a little while stood at her side; then an English gentleman came and took him away. He turned a moment, as he went, to say that he should not be long gone. She gazed after him as he departed.

In the room adjoining the one in which she sat there was dancing going on. The costly curtains, which usually hung from a marble archway and separated the rooms, were withdrawn, so that a full view of the dancers could be obtained. The crash of the music formed a good excuse for not conversing, and with strained eyes Lady Roth sought among the glittering throng the face she wanted to see.

There were fair women there—aristocratic women—many she knew; but she thought that she should recognize among them all the face of Charlotte Berney. She sought in vain. Not one of all those countenances, it seemed to her, could belong to her husband's cousin. Presently she saw Lord Roth approaching her; and, while he was yet some distance off, a woman swept by her with a flash of diamonds that almost blinded her, a throat white as alabaster, eyes blue and soft, laughing lips, and a stately head crowned with golden hair.

It must be Charlotte Berney. Lady Roth guessed it by some wild instinct before she saw her husband advance with outstretched hand, and bow reverently while he looked down at the fair face.

Lady Ellen watched them with her dazzled eyes, and a strong agony convulsed her heart. The music seemed a crash of discord, a hideous noise; she pressed her hand upon her heart to still its wild throbbing.

They were coming toward her now, and her gaze never moved from the smiling face and luminous eyes till they were bent upon her.

"Lady Roth—my cousin, Miss Berney."

Then, in a vague way, she rose and took the dainty hand, and strove to smile at her husband's cousin.

"Miss Berney has promised to dance this waltz with me, Ellen," said Lord Roth. Then, turning to his cousin, he added: "Afterward, Charlotte, I hope to introduce your father to my wife."

"I have quite lost papa, Reginald. He is tired, and wants to go home; so our dance must be a short one."

The accents died away as Charlotte Berney, leaning upon Lord Roth's arm, swept away, with her arch face lifted to his as she spoke.

"Do you feel better now, my lady?" Rachel asked, in her soft manner, as she bent over the still face on the pillow.

All the flush was gone now, and the face was very white, and very weary.

"Yes, I feel better, Rachel. I think I will take a sleeping draught. I want rest."

Yes, she wanted rest—rest from her heartache. But she was not to know it yet—she was to drink the cup of suffering to the dregs and then there would come to her the rest that is promised to the weary.

Rachel gave the draught, and sat by the bed till the tired eyes closed; but the sleep was troubled. Bending over her mistress, the waiting-woman listened to the disturbed moans and broken words.

"I knew it would come this time," she murmured, half aloud; "and I said that, when it came, I should be glad."

CHAPTER VI.

A WIFE'S AGONY.

"WILL you come out on the piazza, Ellen?"

The question came from Lord Roth, as he arranged a light shawl round Charlotte Berney's shoulders. Lady Roth looked up at them.

"No," she replied, "I will stay here."

"Are you not so well to-night, Ellen?" asked Miss Berney.

Lady Ellen shivered under the touch of the jeweled hand.

"I only want quiet and rest," she answered; "I am better alone."

Miss Berney's arched lips were parted in a fascinating smile as she strolled at her cousin's side on the piazza, now flooded with the sunset glory.

Lady Ellen lay still on her couch. It seemed to her that Charlotte Berney was now always in the house. She heard the softer tones of her husband's voice when he addressed Charlotte, she saw the deeper fire in his eyes when they rested upon her. All her fears were realized. Reginald Roth loved his cousin still, and his wife knew it. It was no wonder, she thought; yet day by day the lines of pain and weariness grew upon brow and lip—day by day the gnawing pain grew in her heart—pain that no word of hers might give utterance to.

"Mamma," said the soft voice of little Reginald, "may I stop with you? Rachel said I might—she is talking to Tonio."

Lady Ellen lifted the child to a place beside her, kissing the sweet face and flaxen curls.

"Will you tell me about Ridginghood, mamma? I like stories so much," pleaded the babyish voice.

"Not to-night, Reggy; mamma is tired. You may talk to me instead."

Reginald availed himself of the privilege, and lisped out a disjointed account of his small adventures during the day—of the strange fish that Tonio, the young fisherman, had given to him; of old Mariotta, Tonio's father, who was gone over the sea, but was soon coming home with some wonderful shells he had promised the little "milor"—"pink shells and white ones that would sing in your ears," said Reggy, with wide-open and mysterious eyes.

Lady Ellen listened with the smile she always had for the darling who in his three short years had grown into her heart and life, so closely that her very existence seemed to depend on her child.

Mrs. Kenn entered noiselessly.

"You here, my lady? I thought you were on the terrace with my master," she broke out in surprise.

She came to the couch and arranged the pillows with care. As she did so she glanced at the two figures in the garden, and then at her mistress. For a moment their eyes met.

"Come, master Reggy," said Rachel, turning quickly to the child. "It is bed-time."

He lingered a little, till the rustling of Miss Berney's dress sounded near, and then he hurried away. That lady was not among his favorites.

Charlotte Berney took her leave early that night. Lord Roth placed her in her carriage and retired to spend the evening in his private room. There was nothing tempting to him in the society of his dull and listless wife.

Lady Ellen's solitude was broken by Rachel Kenn. She asked the favor of a few minutes' conversation with her mistress.

"I want to tell you, my lady, that I am going to marry Antonio Alfieri," she said, calmly.

Lady Roth looked up astonished.

"You are surprised, my lady?" said Rachel, coloring.

"Yes; very much, Rachel. But I hope you will be happy. I shall be very sorry to lose you," added the lady, gently.

"I would not leave you for any other reason, my lady," said Mrs. Kenn—she was touched a little by the sympathy, and the unvarying kindness she had received during long years at the hands of the woman she had tried to hate—"but Antonio pleads very hard, and he will be good to me," she continued. "He will be well-to-do, my lady, for old Mariotta, his father, will take but one more trip in the barque, and then he will give it up to Antonio, and live with his friends in Naples."

"It is Mariotta the merchant of whom you speak, is it not?"

"Yes, my lady, the old man with the long white hair, to whom Master Reginald used to talk so much when we first came here. His next voyage will be his last; then Antonio will have the barque."

There was a long pause, and then Lady Roth spoke suddenly, lifting her wistful face:

"But what is to become of Oliver, Rachel?"

"I have arranged with Antonio, my lady," explained the waiting-woman, "that Oliver and my mother are to come out here and live with us—my mother will be willing, for she is lonely by herself. I shall be lonely too, my lady, when Antonio is gone on his trading voyages."

"And if she should not be willing?" said Lady Ellen.

"If she should not be willing to remain," repeated Rachel, calmly, "we must pay for her journey back to England. I can not be separated from Oliver you know, my lady. But my mother has no relative but me; and I feel sure she will choose to make her home with me, wherever it may be."

"And Antonio is willing that it should be so?"

"Antonio has no wish but to make me happy," said Rachel, in a low, but proud tone.

Lady Roth turned her face away. There was a flush on her wan cheek, and a sudden pain in her eyes. Mrs. Kenn went out, closing the door.

Lady Ellen lay still. Her fingers were toying with a little gold crucifix on her throat. It was an old-fashioned ornament that had belonged to her when she was a girl. The initials of her maiden name were in raised letters on the back; and, after her marriage, she caused the initials of the new name to be added. As she lay thinking, her thin fingers passed mechanically over the three letters. Her eyes were filled with unutterable sadness; and, long after Rachel Kenn was gone, they were bent in a wistful gaze upon the waters of the bay, as if, through the gathering twilight, they could see afar off old Mariotta's sail.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HUSBAND'S CONFESSION.

THE morning sunlight was sparkling upon the golden sand and upon the white piazza where the shadow of the leaves, creeping up the pillars, lay thick. It was a very hot morning; the window of Rachel Kenn's chamber was thrown wide open.

Rachel knelt upon the floor in front of an open trunk, in which she was packing linen and finery. She was packing it to take with her for a fortnight's holiday to Antonio's friends in Naples. Lady Ellen—always thoughtful for the happiness of those about her—had given Rachel a present of money with which to buy clothes for her marriage. It was to spend this that Mrs. Kenn was going to Naples.

Her room was a small off-room on the ground floor. Adjoining it on one side was Lord Roth's private apartment, half-study, half-library, where he spent many of the hours when Charlotte Berney was not in the house. The same vine that spread its tendrils about Rachel's window grew in thick luxuriance before Lord Roth's *sanctum*.

This room had two doors—one leading from a tiny conservatory, the other leading into the hall.

Lord Roth was seated before his writing-table this morning, with his face shaded by his hands. Before him lay a paper containing a peremptory application for money. He had had many such lately, but this was an insult that it was hard for proud Lord Roth to face.

On the table were strewn a heterogeneous heap of bills, at the sum total of which he scarcely dared to look. His eyes were fixed upon the sheet before him, every written word of which was torment to his brain. He had sat thus since he opened the letter, two hours ago; and so stupefied did he feel by the shock that his thoughts refused to arrange themselves in order. The amount of money demanded was larger than he could raise. The refusal to raise it would entail—what?

"I suppose it must have come to this, sooner or later," he said to himself, mechanically. "I have tried to hold on, to struggle through for the boy's sake. I would have done it if I could—have kept my honor before the world; but it is more than I can accomplish. Honor!" he moaned passionately. "I don't think I have any honor left since she has crossed my path again! It would be a good thing if death came between me and this load of sin and misery."

Some one entered the room. He raised his head and looked at the beautiful vision before him. A hat with a drooping plume shaded the arch face; a dark riding-dress set off the perfect figure. The lady came to his side, and laid one hand with its white gauntlet on his shoulder.

"What is the matter, Reginald?"

He laid the paper before her in silence. He did not lift his eyes; he dared not; the touch of her hand was almost too much. He bit his lip fiercely, and turned his face away, so that he did not see the scarlet flush that dyed his companion's cheek as she read.

"You must let papa lend you the money," she said, decidedly.

Had she spoken otherwise, breathed one word of sympathy or tenderness, it would have been more than his strength could bear from her. As it was, he could answer; but he did not lift his eyes.

"My choice is limited to these two pleasant alternatives—begging of your father or—ruin."

"Then, Reginald, if it would be less hard to you, let me help you," she said, timidly.

"You?" he asked, vaguely.

"Yes. Remember I am a Roth, too, Reginald. Your honor is mine also. Let me help you; no one, not even my father, need know it," she pleaded.

He rose to his feet.

"Do not tempt me, Charlotte," he said, hoarsely. "After all that has passed between us, it would be too terrible a humiliation to take this at your hands."

She raised her matchless eyes to his face.

"After all that has passed between us!" she repeated, passionately. "Oh, Reginald, both our lives were darkened by one man, and of all the world that man would rejoice the most if you were dishonored in men's eyes!"

She never forgot his face as she saw it then, when he had drank to the dregs the cup of humiliation. Every nerve quivered within him as he stood, and his downcast eyes glowed like fire beneath the dusky lashes.

She laid her hand on his arm.

"You will not let Philip Haughton have this triumph, Reginald? If ever you loved me, take this favor at my hands."

"If ever I loved you?" he madly replied. "Oh, Heaven, my very brain is reeling with the love I have borne you, and which I never can crush out!"

"Hush!" she whispered, drawing her hand from his passionate clasp. "It was your fault, Reginald, not mine; yet I too have to suffer. Only my own heart knows its bitterness, but the world shall not read my secret."

The mournful words fell slowly from her pallid lips.

"Do not taunt me, Charlotte, or I shall go mad!" he cried, bitterly. "I would give my life to undo the past. My life is intolerable to me—my heart is breaking for the love of you!"

He laid his hands tenderly upon her shoulders as he stood before her, and looked down into her face with burning eyes. The brim of her hat hid the scarlet flush that his gaze brought into her face. She put his hands gently away, and turned from him.

"I will go now; to-morrow I will see you again. It is best for both of us to be apart just now," she said, in low and plaintive tones.

He sunk upon his knees by the table, folded his arms upon it, and buried his face in them.

Turning at the door, she hastened for a moment to his side.

"Heaven bless you, Reginald!" she murmured, passionately; then moving away, she glided quickly from the room.

He neither moved nor spoke. Once, as her footsteps died away, a deep, convulsive sob shook his frame. Then succeeded a long silence, broken by the rustle of a silken dress.

The wearer was Lady Ellen. He lifted his face with a sudden movement and stared wildly at her as she stood midway in the room—the lilies in her hand not whiter than her face.

He looked at her with unutterable loathing. He had no pity for her—no regret that she had heard words no wife could hear and not resent. He felt nothing for her but hatred.

"Leave me! For Heaven's sake, leave me to myself!" he cried, in frenzied accents. "The salvation of my house, my lands, my child, my peace of mind, my hopes on earth, are all sacrificed, all destroyed, by you!"

The flood-gates of his wild passion were let loose. Had he known the price he was to pay for his mad words, surely his better judgment would have restrained this insane speech.

Lady Ellen had heard from the conservatory all that had passed—heard words from her husband's lips that sealed the assurance she had long felt. Yet his wild despair had drawn from the well-spring of her love an unutterable desire to comfort him, though her own heart was broken. In the years to come her face as it looked now would often haunt his nightly dreams and waking thoughts. For a moment she stood as one turned into stone, then walked slowly to the door. Pausing for a moment, she looked back, but his face was buried again, so she passed out of the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WIFE'S FLIGHT.

SCARCELY a week later Rachel Kenn came up the garden toward the white piazza. Old Mariotta Alfieri had already started upon the voyage that was to be his last, for on his return the barque was to be Antonio's. He was bound for Marseilles with a mixed cargo. The time of his return would depend upon the dispatch with which he conducted his trading; but, as soon as he did return, Rachel and Antonio were to be married. Already a French maid had been engaged for "my lady," that Rachel might have leisure to make any needful preparations for her wedding. Lady Ellen was always thoughtful for the comfort of those about her.

It was a glorious summer morning when Rachel Kenn came up the garden toward the white piazza. It might have been her fancy, but she thought there was an air of something unusual taking place, although to all appearance the house and grounds were the same. She quickened her steps. Passing round to a side entrance, she encountered Jacquetta, the French maid, whose neat attire was strangely disordered.

"Ciel! Madame Kenn, have you heard the terrible news?" she cried, raising her hands expressively. "Ah, to think you should be away—*c'est horrible!*"

"Bad news?" questioned Rachel, turning white with a nameless terror. "I have but this moment returned; I have heard nothing."

"Not heard? *Ah, c'est une merveille!* It is my lady who is gone, and the little monsieur!"

Rachel grasped her arm convulsively.

"Gone!" she repeated, with white lips. "Gone where?"

"How can I tell? No one knows, Madame Kenn. It is now two days since it happened. *Milord* is mad—he is *distrail*."

So she spoke. Her listener stood as one in a dream, hearing nothing, but in her bewildered brain trying to comprehend the horror of this thing that had come upon the master's house.

Presently she turned from Jacquetta and went indoors.

"Madame Kenn is a person I do not like; it is a good thing she is gone; she and I would never get on together—never!" said the offended little Frenchwoman to herself, as Rachel walked away in the midst of a voluble description of Lord Roth's despair.

In the house Rachel met the butler. The two stopped simultaneously.

"Where is my master?" she asked, hoarsely.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"On a wild-goose chase, I think, Mrs. Kenn. My lady had a night's start of him; though it seems to me"—he added, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper—"that he's more troubled about the boy than about her. I've never heard him mention her name, but Robert said he cried out for his son when they first told him. What do you suppose she's gone for, Mrs. Kenn?"

"How should I know?" she returned, angrily, with a flash of her bright eyes as she passed him.

She went to her own room—the pretty, sunny little apartment adjoining Lord Roth's private room. She darkened the tiny chamber and pressed her hands to her forehead; a hot, burning flush was on her face.

"This is my doing," she thought, repeating the words over and over again. "It was I who first sowed the seeds of this calamity—I said I should be glad if such a sorrow came upon him; and now—now I would give my life to undo it!"

She started up in a frenzy of remorse and paced the room, the old butler's words ringing in her ears—"Why has she gone?"

Why? To Rachel's mind there was but one answer—"Because of Charlotte Berney."

"I helped it on. I added the fuel to the flame to gratify my revenge. I have broken his heart and sent her out a wanderer from her home. I have brought disgrace and desolation upon my master's house."

She laid her head down on the snowy bed, and hot tears coursed down her cheeks. A vision of the mild face of her mistress haunted her and almost drove her to madness.

She sat on longer than she imagined, a prey to bitter remorse. Now that a new love was born in her heart, softening it, and making her life interesting again to her, she was bitterly sorry that any words or acts of her own had fostered and increased the sadness of the gentle lady whom she had tried to hate.

The sun was high when she entered the room, and the red sunset was now flooding the bay as she rose up to unfasten her bonnet and the light shawl she wore. Pausing a moment to lay some trifle in a little ebony box which Lady Ellen had given her, her eyes fell upon a folded paper with something written upon it. The clear delicate writing was Lady Roth's, the inscription written firmly:

"In the hands of Rachel Kenn, for my husband, Lord Roth."

Utterly regardless of the fact that the letter was hers only in trust for another, she tore it open, and with throbbing pulses read it.

"LORD ROTH—When I left you this morning, it seemed to me that the words you had spoken were beyond all forgiveness or reparation. I now think differently. You have done me a great wrong. No greater could a wife suffer, or be called upon to forgive; yet, because I am your wife, and for our hapless child's sake, I do forgive you. But I can never return to your roof—never again be more than a stranger to you. Our paths in life are separate from this hour.

"To-night I sail with Mariotta Alfieri for Marseilles; thence I shall go to Paris, where I have a relative—an aunt of my father—living in the Rue St. Honore. There I will abide, and wait for any

communication from you. I take my child with me—for the present it is best that he should remain in my care. Whenever, in the future, you desire him to be restored to your roof and care, I shall obey your wish implicitly.

"Before this is placed in your hands I shall be far on my way. You will have somewhat recovered from your madness, and will have had due time for consideration. As we are henceforth strangers, the wider our paths lie apart the better for both.

"ELLEN ROTH."

With a deep-drawn breath of relief, Rachel Kenn folded the letter, and placed it in her bosom.

"Three days since it was written, and laid upon that box!" she mused. "Thank Heaven I returned to-day! Three days and nights since Mariotta Alfieri sailed, and the barque is bound for Marseilles!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE SISTER'S RETURN.

ALTHOUGH it was May, it was chilly enough for a fire to be pleasant in the evening. A very bright one burned in the drawing-room of the Reedes—the long, pleasant apartment wherein, twenty years ago, Lord Roth and Adrian Rutherford had laughingly betrothed their two infant children, binding them by a promise that was only to be fulfilled by the desire of both in the after years.

Very pleasant and homelike the room looked to-night. Upon the center-table a silver-coffee service with dainty cups gleamed in the lamp-light. In every available niche exquisite ferns drooped feathery branches from their vases. At a writing-table sat Mrs. Rutherford.

Time had dealt gently with the Squire's wife; the bloom yet lingered on her cheeks, which were smooth and delicate as of old—the sweet smile still came readily to her lips. Beneath the lace cap her soft hair—among the ripples of which a few gray threads were visible—was gathered away from her unwrinkled forehead. Very motherly, very womanly, very sweet, was Adrian Rutherford's wife.

At the other end of the long room were two girls—one standing in a thoughtful attitude by the sofa whereon lay the other, a pale, patient girl of some fourteen years, whose life was shadowed by a complaint which confined her always to a couch.

Yet Florence Rutherford did not permit the shadow that hung over her life to darken her home. She did not let it be felt among those she loved, to whom she was a sweet presence, much and tenderly beloved. Neither was her own life quite cheerless; she found warmth, companionship and sunlight in the one art which she was permitted to cultivate, and which was to her what pleasure and society are to most girls. She was but a sorry disciple, following with faltering steps in the path trodden by the masters of her art. Her own failings never discouraged her—only made her love and revere her exemplars the more; and her art gave her something to think of always—something to take her out of herself.

As she half reclined, propped up by sofa-pillows, she was sorting and laying in neat order a number of sketches, engravings and etchings with which the table at her side was strewn, pausing now and then to toss back her heavy dark hair, or to gaze affectionately at some sketch after Rubens, Van-dyke, or her favorite, Michael Angelo.

The other girl, dark-haired, dark-eyed, with an arch and piquant face, and a small, slight form, stood by the table handing the precious possessions to the other. She was four years older than the invalid. Between these two one had died in infancy.

Squire Rutherford—with whose cheery face so large a dash of sunshine was missing from the room—was gone to Dijon. A week ago intelligence had reached him of his aunt's rapidly failing health. The intelligence had come from Beatrix, and the Squire had hastened to her immediately.

Two years had elapsed since Beatrix had visited

her home. Until two years ago her residence with her wealthy and lonely godmother had been varied by the long summer holiday she had yearly spent with her family at the Reedes. Not even his regard for his wealthy and warmly-loved relative—whose whole existence seemed bound up in her golden-haired little goddaughter—would have induced the Squire to forego these annual visits of his eldest daughter, but that two years ago Miss Martha Rutherford's rapidly declining health caused her to cling to Beatrix for constant support, and to shrink with evident pain at the thought of the girl's leaving her even for a day.

This being the case, the Squire—who rightly divined that his aunt's days were numbered—had submitted to the loss of Beattie's visit for two summers past, consoling himself by crossing the Channel occasionally, and spending a couple of days under his aunt's roof. Longer not even his love for his daughter could induce the Squire to stay from his native land.

The past week had brought a message from Beatrix and a telegram from Miss Margaret Rutherford's lawyer. The Squire had hastened to be present at her deathbed. He would bring Beatrix home with him—home for good.

To the two younger sisters the idea was very pleasant. They looked forward to her coming with intense delight.

"I want these sketches laid aside for mounting. Georgie. Mr. Noel has promised to do them for me," said Florence Rutherford.

Georgie went on sorting for a minute.

"Never mind the sketches, Flo.; I can think of nothing but Beatrix," she said, throwing the drawings aside with a quick, impatient movement.

"Nor I," was the quiet reply.

Florence trifled for a moment with those she held, while her dark eyes conjured up a vision of her sister, now on her journey homeward. In the vision, Beatrix was endowed with high art, grace and beauty by the little sister whose whole life was a long dream of these things.

There came a rumbling of carriage-wheels on the drive; a flash of light from the hall lamp fell upon a black-robed figure with golden hair and starry blue eyes. Squire Rutherford, proud and happy, stood aside while the rest crowded round Beatrix and with fond welcomes, drew her into the light and warmth.

Often lately Florence Rutherford had dreamed day-dreams of her sister, picturing her with tender yearning love, but never had a face so fair and pure and proud entered her thoughts as the one she now beheld. All this evening Florence's rapt eyes scarcely left the graceful figure, the haunting, flower-like face.

"How beautiful she has grown—how glad I am that she is my sister!" thought the girl, whose love for all that was bright and beautiful was as intense as her religion. A little later, when Beatrix bent over her for a good-night kiss, Florence spoke suddenly out of her thoughts.

"Beattie, I hope you will always be happy."

"So do I, and I hope that you will too, darling. What makes you say that now, Flo?"

The blue eyes looked down at her with a little wonder.

"Oh, I don't know," was the dreamy reply. "You ought to be as happy as you are lovely—I hope you will be. Good-night."

Mrs. Rutherford had conducted Beatrix to the beautiful and warmly-lighted dressing-room adjoining the bed-room that she was to occupy, and left her with tender injunctions to retire immediately. Beatrix meant to obey. She drew an easy-chair to the fire and placed her feet on the fender. "I must have five minutes to realize it," she thought.

Then her thoughts went out of the room and the pleasant home to somebody else—somebody she had thought about a good deal at times, and whom she

would see to-morrow—Reginald Roth—but they were speedily interrupted.

"I couldn't resist coming to your room for a cosy talk. It's a treasure I have so often coveted—a dear sister to whom I can unburden my mind," said Georgie Rutherford, entering suddenly, and alighting bird-like upon a chintz ottoman, and contemplating her sister with an ecstatic smile. "This is charming, Beatrix."

"I can scarcely realize how charming," answered Beatrix, quite happy.

"I shall come for a confidential chat every night," continued Georgie, tossing back her unbound hair. "I'm afraid some one else will monopolize you in the day. However, we have a long golden summer before us to spend together, and to know each other again."

Georgie settled her chin in her hand and rattled on. "Beattie, will you promise to tell me all your secrets—everything—for the time we are together? I will tell you all my very, darkest mysteries. Promise."

"I promise," said Beatrix, laughingly.

"The very profoundest?"

"Everything."

How easy it was to promise, sitting there and looking into the piquant face upon which the fire-light played! How little did Beatrix dream that long before the golden summer waned she would find the promise a heavy chain around her heart!

"Are you not anxious to hear about Reginald?" questioned Georgie, airily; and accepting Beatrix's changing color for assent, she continued: "He is at home, you know, of course, and Lord Roth, too. They returned from Germany in the early spring. Reginald wished to accompany papa to Calais to meet you, but we all thought that it would be nicer to have the first meeting among ourselves. He is coming to dinner to-morrow. He is the handsomest, dearest fellow in the world—a little reserved to strangers, but a model of amiability to those he knows. I wrote and described him to you—didn't I?—even his eyes, which are surpassingly beautiful. In fact, had I not known that he was your especial property, I should have fallen in love with him myself the moment that I saw him," concluded Georgie, with delightful candor.

Beatrix listened in happy silence, shading her face a little that Georgie might not see the happy smile on her lips. Presently Georgie began again.

"Reginald attained the highest honors at the German University where he has studied. He spends much of his time here. I think he must be dreary at the Hall, Beattie. I fairly hate Lord Roth; a more gloomy, morose man I never knew. Papa says that he is much changed since he went abroad, seventeen years ago; but I don't believe he was ever nice-tempered. He treats Reginald with elaborate courtesy—I hate such cold ceremony—and shuts himself up in that gloomy old Hall. I hope you'll make it more cheerful when you live there, Beattie. Reginald says that he thinks a home without a woman but half a home. It is such a pity he has not a sister even. He cannot remember his mother; he was not much more than three years old when she died at Naples, you know. Did I tell you that he has an old Italian servant? Such a strange little fellow! Reggy picked him up somewhere abroad. I study Carlo Marini—he interests me. If, after all that I have told you about your *fiancee*, you are not half in love with him, Beatrix, you ought to be."

Georgie shot a swift glance at her sister, drew her own conclusion, and rattled on.

"What a fortunate girl you are, Beattie! You have all the family beauty, a glorious husband waiting to place a coronet on your brow, and you will go to him with Free Chace in one hand, and aunt Margaret's money in the other—a princess endowed by a fairy godmother, I shall be devoured by envy; though, next to having a title oneself, the best thing is for one's sister to have one."

"You may have one, Georgie."

"Oh no! Don't suggest it, pray," said Georgie, with resignation. "I am not suited for one. I have not that 'repose' which is so essential to the wearers of titles. No, you may 'marry the laird,' Beattie—

And jewels so fair you may twine in your hair—
They are better for you than me.

But how thoughtless I am! And you so tired! Good-night, darling."

Beatrix returned the warm kiss and embrace, and Georgie glided out of the room, leaving her sister to settle herself among the cushions and fall into a fresh reverie.

Yes, she was half in love with Reginald Roth already. Perhaps the feeling dated further back than she cared to own. He had been in her thoughts always—the hero of all her girlish dreams and romances—the lover who was faithful to her through years of absence, who looked forward as she did to the hour when they should look in each other's face and clasp hands, who had kept his heart free for her, unfettered by any other love, as she did hers for him.

To-morrow they were to meet. A strange thrill ran through her as she thought of it, even to her finger-tips. To-morrow!

She rose and went to the mirror. She had always been interested in her beauty; to-night she was specially so. Her blue eyes shone like stars, her golden hair fell in ripples to her waist. Her wrapper, open at the throat, met her fair skin with folds of delicate lace; in her cheeks a crimson color glowed like the rose, and she knew it would glow still deeper when Reginald Roth's eyes rested upon her face to-morrow.

"Will he be satisfied?" she asked, as a conscious light sparkled in her eyes, and a happy smile curved her lips. Yes; he would be more than satisfied.

Who hath not proved how feebly words essay
To fix one spark of Beauty's heavenly ray?
Who doth not feel, until his failing sight
Faints into dimness with its own delight,
His changing cheek, his sinking heart confess
The might, the majesty of loveliness?

For the first time in her life there came to Beatrix Rutherford a consciousness of the power which her wealth and beauty gave her; and a thrill of triumph ran through her as she proudly contemplated her own face, so fair, so exquisitely lovely."

If she had known then that before the end of the coming summer this gift of beauty would wreck the happiness of a brave heart, she would have laid her golden head upon its pillow with far different feelings to-night. But she did not, and she fell asleep to dream of roses red and white lying beneath her feet—of glad sunny days, of dewy evenings laden with the odor of flowers, and, amid all, a strong hand, whose touch filled her with ecstasy, holding hers; of dark, love-laden eyes telling her the old, old story in this "golden summer" of her life.

CHAPTER X.

WAS IT LOVE?

BEATRIX rose and dressed the next morning as one in a beautiful dream. This new life was such a bright change from the calm, quiet days spent in her grandmother's house in France. The young companionship of her sisters was another delight new to her—Georgie so bright and quaint, Florence so dreamy and subdued. A sense of happiness too intense for expression stole over her as she fastened the ribbon in her hair, and threw open the window to the May morning.

As she descended the staircase she saw Georgie in the hall talking to a gentleman. She held her hat by the strings, and the skirt of her morning-dress was festooned over her arm, showing the pretty petticoat and dainty shoes. Her back was turned to the staircase. She did not see her sister, but an-

answered her companion's remarks with low rippling laughter and bright words.

Beatrix paused on the bottom stair, and looked at the two, waiting for Georgie to turn. After a moment, she stole a glance at Georgie's companion. He was very handsome, rather pale, but classical-featured, with neither beard nor mustache to spoil the exquisite contour of a faultless mouth and chin. A very sunny smile played on his lips as he listened to and answered Miss Georgie. Curly nut-brown hair fell loosely over the broad brow.

Beatrix looked at him with girlish interest, till suddenly she became aware of an answering gaze from two exceedingly bright gray eyes. Something more than interest shone in them as they dwelt upon the white-robed girl on the staircase—surprise, wonder and intense admiration.

Georgie, observing the direction of the gray eyes, turned suddenly.

"Beatrix—at last!" Then with a smile she dropped her dress, and introduced her companion to her sister. "Beatrix—Mr. Noel. Mr. Noel—my sister."

For a brief moment the blue eyes met the keen gray ones. Beatrix was not a coquette, but she felt the ready crimson deepen in her cheeks as she met the rapt admiration of the glance bent upon her. And in that moment some strange, indefinable feeling crept into her heart—not joy, not pain, different from both, stronger than either.

Was it something past, something to come that touched a chord of her inmost being at that instant?

For Mr. Noel the only feeling was one of rapt ecstasy, begun then, only to die with his death. It would kindle within him whenever his eyes fell upon her: it would haunt him when she was not near. In all the days that he saw her afterward—and they were many—he never forgot her as he saw her now, with the May sunshine on her golden hair, bound up with the black ribbon, and her white dress falling round her on the broad staircase.

He bowed to the girls and turned away, opening the door near him, and closing it as he entered the room.

"H'm!" said Georgie, kissing her sister, and looking at her expressively. "It's a good thing that you belong to Reginald Roth, or I can plainly see that this would have been a case of love at first sight, as the novel says."

"Don't be absurd! Who is he, Georgie?" asked Beatrix.

"I wonder," continued Georgie, contemplatively, "whether he was regarding you merely from an art point of view. I've talked to that man scores of times, but he never looked at me with such interest. Certainly, I'm not the sort of person to put in a painting, whereas you would do for anything from Cleopatra to an Arcadian shepherdess."

"You have not told me who he is," repeated Beatrix, in an amused tone.

"Mr. Noel, master of the Ickston School of Art. He comes here to teach Flo, who, I believe, cherishes an insane belief that he is a sort of divinity, to be worshiped next to his art. You will see him pretty often if you go with me to the Art Class at Ickston; but don't fall in love with him ever so little. Now come to breakfast. We have waited for you."

Beatrix laughed merrily. It was but a short time before the lightly-spoken warning echoed sadly in both their hearts.

After breakfast, Georgie took Beatrix into the garden. There was so much to see and admire—from the lime tree on the south lawn to the laurel walk, where the Squire was wont to smoke his after-dinner cigar as of old.

After a time, Georgie went in for the book she was reading. Beatrix strolled through the shrubbery to a little iron gate leading out upon the high road. It was seldom used by the family. The trees inside grew thick and pleasant, the road outside stretched away between high, green hedges. Beatrix leaned upon the gate, and fell into a pro-

found reverie. She had tied a lace handkerchief over her hair, knotting it beneath her chin; her white dress made a break in the thick green around her.

She was thinking of Reginald Roth. Now that the meeting was so near she shrunk from it a little. She wondered how he would look, what he would say. She thought that he would be very satisfied with her outward self. "I will try to make him like me for myself. But so much depends upon a first impression," thought Beatrix, with a satisfied thrill. She would have liked to meet Reginald dressed in the tender blue that suited her so well, with, perhaps, a blue ribbon among her hair. But that was impossible, as she was mourning for her aunt. She decided upon white. Beatrix favored white. Yes, she would wear a misty white crepe, and perhaps she might venture upon the palest blush-rose, just for this one occasion. She was so anxious for Reginald Roth to see her at her best.

She imagined how she would walk forward to meet him—not too eagerly or too hesitatingly, but in the happy "just-between" way that she knew suited her.

"Beatrix!"

The word fell on her ears in a tone of glad surprise. She looked up quickly, to see a brown, glossy horse nibbling the hedge by the gate, and his rider looking down at her.

There was no need to ask who it was. The broad-built stately man, with dark eyes and hair, olive skin, and square, determined face, answered Georgie's description exactly.

For a few minutes neither spoke. By tacit consent the two looked in each other's faces; then Beatrix's eyes, beaming with joy, drooped, and, with another thrill of triumph, her heart said, "Yes—Reginald is satisfied."

In silence he laid his hand upon hers, as it lay on the iron rail, and, lifting it to his lips, pressed a chivalrous kiss upon it.

The long, happy day was ended. In the summer twilight, as Beatrix stood alone in the window, Reginald Roth came to her side.

"Good-night, Beatrix."

She turned her happy face to him. Already she was learning to love him. Some impulse moved him to take her in his arms, and draw the golden head upon his breast.

"I have waited for you always," he whispered, low and tenderly. "I have dreamt of this hour, Beatrix. From it I date the beginning of a new life, of which every thought will be dedicated to you. My heart tells me that I shall love you very dearly, my beautiful, my promised bride—mine from the first sweet breath that you drew. I will strive to be worthy of you, Beatrix. Do you think you can love me dearest?"

"Yes," she answered, quickly. It was a true answer then.

He went on speaking fervently—

"From this hour I live but for you, Beatrix. I will hold your happiness my first and most sacred charge. For your sake I will do or dare aught, even to laying down my life. Heaven help me to keep my vow!"

She lay still on his strong breast and heard the words. Long before the summer was over they would come back to her; and she would remember the vow, and how he kept it.

Once more alone, Beatrix opened the window of her dressing-room, and leaned out to breathe the balmy night air that floated up to her, laden with delicate and fragrant perfume from the garden. Overhead, the stars gleamed in a purple sky, and afar off a nightingale was pouring forth a flood of melody.

"How good he is! How brave and tender and chivalrous! How I shall love him! I could not help

it if I would. I can never repay such love but by returning it, my brave Reginald!"

The musing grew vague and rambling as she knelt there, her hands clasped on the ledge, her face pressed upon them. Days, weeks and months stretched out before her, filled with bright pictures of coming joy—of rides through leafy lanes with Reginald; of a picnic in the grounds of Rotheourt Hall, and a ramble in the picture gallery; of drives into Iekston—five miles distant—to take lessons with Georgie at the School of Art, presided over by Mr. Noel; of dreamy hours spent out of doors beneath the shadow of the lime-tree.

And then there entered into her thoughts the memory of a proud, yet winning face, with deep gray eyes, and a wreath of nut-brown hair—a memory that staid with her all night, strangely coloring and brightening her dreams.

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW CHARACTER.

THE lime-tree cast a cool shade on the velvet turf beneath it. The garden of the Reedes was in all the freshness of its June glory. The green Venetian blinds were down in all the windows of the house facing the south-east.

Beneath the lime-tree were Reginald Roth and Beatrix. He lay at her feet, and her white hands toyed with his dark curls while he read aloud from the tuneful pages of *Reverie*.

Yes, Beattie's golden summer had begun, the curtain was drawn up on her life's romance. She lived in a glorious day-dream, drinking to her fill from the cup of ambrosia that destiny held to her lips.

Reginald read on, lifting his eloquent eyes now and then to the exquisite face that bent above him. The starry eyes met his with a smile, but no blush was called up by his glance, no thrill answered to the touch of his hand on hers, no shy tremor made her heart leap when he pressed one white hand against his dark mustache; yet she thought—nay, was sure—that she loved Reginald Roth.

Presently Georgie came across the lawn, and settled herself much as a brown and white butterfly might, at Beatrix's side.

"Don't mind me," she said, graciously; "I'll turn my back upon you, that you may continue to be sentimental. What are you reading?"

Reginald held up the book lazily.

"*Reverie*! Quite too melancholy for a June morning!"

"It is sad, but I like it," answered Beatrix, dreamily.

"I don't, to-day. Why, the morning is a poem in itself, set to the music of the birds' voices. It is too sweet to do aught but dream."

"Who is nestling in your heart, Georgie?" asked Reginald, smiling.

"Why do you think there is some one?" asked Georgie, sharply.

"You are poetical—that is one reason for thinking so; also, you are idle. Both of these frames of mind are unlike you."

Georgie looked straight at him with a very obvious effort to be indifferent. Then her brown eyes were averted quickly, and a little deepening of the dusky red in her cheek "told tales."

She held up clusters of fresh-gathered roses, white and crimson, and tossed a deep hued one into Beatrix's lap, near to the dark head.

Reginald murmured softly:

"Oh, what are these roses bright
That in thy garland blow—
These roses red as blood,
These roses white as snow?"

He took the rose from Beatrix's hand.

"Do you know what this says to me?" he asked, dreamily.

"Does it say anything?" said she gravely.

"Yes, but it is a strange thought. It speaks of a

passion deep as its crimson dye, of a love stronger than death, lying in the dust, crushed by its own intensity."

His voice was very low. Beatrix held up another—a pure white one.

"And this?" she asked, softly.

"It is like you, I think, darling," he said, fondly—"pure, bright and sweet. If a summer tempest passes over it, it will bend its head a while, and then lift it purer, sweeter for the rain, and bloom on to a perfect end."

There was silence for a few minutes; then Georgie spoke suddenly:

"What do you say to a picnic, Beattie? This is just the weather for one."

"I should like it, Georgie. Here comes Frank Dare."

"I saw the carriage go round just now. I expect Mrs. Dare wants to see you, Beatrix," said Georgie.

With leisurely steps Captain Dare came across the lawn to the lime tree, in full view of the eyes beneath it. He could bear any criticism. Old Sir Dalrymple's son was stalwart and handsome.

He bowed to the group and proceeded to tell his errand. "Would Miss Rutherford accompany him back to the house? His mother and sisters wished for the pleasure of her company for a little while." Miss Rutherford rose and took Reginald's offered arm. The two went away together.

"I am sorry you've disturbed us, Captain Dare," said Georgie, with a languishing look at that gentleman, who stood toying with a cluster of leaves within his reach. "We were having such a jolly time discussing a picnic."

"I hope I am to be invited," he observed, lazily, looking down at the piquant face, which was a trifle rosier.

"Certainly. If there is no room in the carriages, you can come after us with the baskets," was the dry reply.

"Much obliged. When is it to be? Please sit still; my message did not include you."

He laid a detaining hand on her shoulder, and seated himself in the place Beattie had left vacant.

"How delicious this is!"

"The position or the prospect?" asked Georgie, satirically.

"Both. I could stay here any length of time and be happy."

"Even if it rained?" questioned the lady, severely.

"Even then. I have read somewhere a delicious poem about somebody sitting under trees in summer rain. Must that work be finished in such haste?"

"I am going in, Captain Dare; please give me my flowers."

She sprung up and turned away, leaving the roses on the ground. A single word followed her—

"Georgie!"

She turned back, her face glowing.

"Come back!"

She wavered an instant, and then, parting her lips in an arch smile, she skimmed across the lawn, humming "Comin' through the Rye."

Captain Dare lingered a little under the lime tree, and presently followed the graceful figure, with slow footsteps, and a quiet smile on his lips.

Mr. Noel was walking home to Iekston from the Reedes. Although the Squire's carriage was always at his disposal, either to convey him to or from Iekston on his weekly visit as Florence's master, he often chose to walk in these pleasant summer days. He went along with a firm, yet easy and rapid stride. His walk was as thoroughly graceful as everything else about him. The fresh wind blew on his face; he removed the light straw hat he wore and let the breeze lift the nut brown curls from his forehead. Perhaps, in all the studies from the antique that the pupils of the Iekston School of Art copied in crayon and chalk, there was not one head more beautiful than the master's.

Coming along in the opposite direction was the Rothcourt carriage—the lumbering, old-fashioned vehicle which had been in its glory twenty years ago. In it Lord Roth sat alone. His eyes fell upon the tall, erect figure and uncovered head of the man walking on the turf at the roadside. As the carriage passed, the brilliant gray eyes met his own. Then it passed on.

Lord Roth leaned back. His lips, beneath the heavy mustache, were pale as death. "It was but a passing fancy," he said to himself; "but it seemed as if her eyes were looking at me as they looked that day."

"A passing fancy," he called it, but it left him white and tremulous for hours after; and the first thing he did on reaching home was to enter the gloomy picture gallery—it was always gloomy, even in June—and, drawing the curtain that veiled one of the portraits, to gaze eagerly at the pictured face.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIRST SHADOW ON THE HEART.

GEORGIE RUTHERFORD looked fascinating in a white pique dress and a sailor hat with black ribbons. She stood on the lawn drawing on her gloves. Near her stood Beatrix, in white, too, but with a black-lace "spencer" crossed on her bosom, and in her hand a red rose.

"I must say good-by to Flo," she said, suddenly, and passed indoors.

They were going to Rothcourt. The picnic planned by Georgie was to take place in the grounds of Rothcourt. Beatrix knew that Mr. Noel was with her sister—they were laughing and talking merrily as she entered.

"I am come to say good-by, Flo," she said, crossing the room, which was littered with books, drawings mounted and unmounted, palettes and pencils.

"I hope you will have a nice day, Beattie," returned Flo. "Be sure to ask Reginald to show you the picture of the old Lord Roth who was beheaded for treason in Charles the Second's reign. And, oh, Beattie, Mr. Noel has been telling me about a poor woman at Ickston who makes lace. She is in a consumption, and Mr. Noel thinks that you would help her if you knew. She is very poor."

Beatrix looked at the artist.

"I am interested in her because she is very poor and very disagreeable," he said, smiling. Beatrix thought the smile was very beautiful. "Unfortunately I have no necessity for lace," he went on; "and she will accept help in no other way."

"I understand," rejoined Beatrix. "I will certainly help her if I can. Mr. Noel." Then she turned again to Flo—"Good-by, darling."

Yet, even as she said the last word, bending over Florence, some strange impulse made her lift her eyes again to the face of the man standing near. Something in the brilliant depths of the eyes bent upon her made her lower her own quickly, while a burning flush dyed her brow. She turned away with a low "Good-morning," and went out. On Mr. Noel's lips lingered the faintest smile, as he turned to his little pupil with some trifling direction concerning her work. And on the carpet at his feet lay the crimson rose, broken from its stem.

The sunlight lay golden on the terrace in front of Rothcourt. In the full light stood Lord Roth, Reginald, and the Rutherfords. Scattered about the grounds and over the lawn were the guests, in bright dresses and fluttering ribbons, making an unusual scene of brilliancy for the grounds of Rothcourt.

Lord Roth had changed much in the years he had spent abroad. His hair was almost snowy white; his hands were unsteady. Standing at Squire Rutherford's side, the contrast between the two men was striking—the Squire's golden locks were thick and glossy, his step still elastic.

Beatrix had seen Lord Roth but once since her return. He seldom came abroad. His greeting of the

young girl was as deferential as if she had been a queen—and very like a queen she looked in her girlish beauty, and with the innate dignity that was a part of her bearing.

They stood so in a little group—Beatrix, Reginald, and his father. A magnificent peacock, enticed by Reginald, came up to the terrace, and ate the biscuit-crumbs from Beatrix's hand. It was a pretty picture, seen from the lawn. Mrs. Rutherford looked at it, with a proud consciousness that other people saw it too.

No one—least of all the man at her side—dreamed that there was a vague and mysterious feeling haunting the brain, bewildering the fancy, and disturbing the repose of that apparently tranquil girl. Little did Reginald imagine what was passing in the heart of the fair girl who was to be his wife—the mistress of the old Hall—the future Lady Roth; but there was a something within her rebelling and crying out passionately against this public sealing of the compact between herself and Lord Roth's son.

She knew what her position at his side, on the threshold of his home, meant to the eyes of all these people. She knew that they looked upon her as the future Lady Roth, and she hated the thought. She was binding her fetters tightly, and she could not help herself. She hated herself, too, for this sudden dislike that had risen within her against the fate that her father had set his hopes upon for her, and that her own hopes had been content to rest upon till now. Why was she so suddenly dissatisfied? What was the secret cause of the change that was coming over her?

The Squire came up, linked his arm in Lord Roth's, and the two men strolled away together as they had so often done before in the old days.

Beatrix turned to Reginald.

"Let us go somewhere—anywhere! I do not want to stay here, Reginald," she said, impatiently; and, throwing the crumbs carelessly upon the ground, she laid her hand on his arm. Then she added, "I have lost my rose; will you find me another?"

He led her to a rose-bed. It was a quiet and undisturbed spot. He gathered a superb flower, and stripped it of its thorns.

"I love roses," she said, fastening it where the other had lain.

"You shall have plenty of beds devoted to them when you come here, darling. I will plan a rose-garden—a perfect wilderness of roses, Beatrix, where we can sit together and read on such days as this."

He spoke in such glad tones of the time when she should live at Rothcourt. The words jarred painfully on her.

"There shall be a special seat in our rose-garden, Beatrix. You shall sit there, the queen among the roses—my queen—my rose—my beautiful wife!"

How his voice lingered on the fond words, as he uttered these dreamy fancies of future happiness!

"I thought, when I first saw you, Beatrix—you for whom I had waited and longed—that I could not love you more than I did then. Yet, even in this short time, my love has increased a thousandfold. I love you as Arthur loved Guinevere—as Gabriel loved Evangeline—as Jacob loved Rachel."

The soft tones, full of impassioned tenderness, fell upon her ears, yet touched no answering chord within her heart. He thought the drooping eyelids veiled eyes too shy to meet his own.

"Do you think you could be true to me through years of absence, and perhaps suffering, Beatrix? Do you think your love would be strong enough to bear you on through such suffering as Evangeline's?"

He waited for an answer, bending down to her.

"I think it would," she whispered.

He took her in his arms, and pressed hot, passionate kisses on her lips, and even while he did so her heart cried out within her that she was a traitress.

Yes, her love would live, strong, deep, and warm in her heart, while she lived; it would bear her through all trials; but that love was not for the

man who pressed her to his heart, whose wife she was to be. It was not for him, and she knew it. If she had not known it before, she knew it now.

The soft breeze played among the roses around them, the breath of the flowers came up from the beds. Reginald Roth, standing in all the beauty and glory of the time and place, was full of a joy too deep for words. Never again in his life would such an hour of bliss come to him—an hour that in after years he would look back upon as one looks back upon the first fresh hopes and joyous visions of life that soon became part of the dust and ashes of the past. To Beatrice there came a feeling of unutterable pain and remorse, so intense, so fraught with bitterness, that she could have fallen at his feet and hidden her guilty face from his eyes and from the light of day.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOUR SCENES.

THE last carriage—which was the Squire's—had rolled away, and Lord Roth, with his son, sat in the library. It wore the same gloomy yet grand aspect as of old; but on Lord Roth's brow there was a look of greater ease, as if the heavy shadow of care which dwelt there had partly rolled away.

"She is a beautiful woman, and will wear her honors well," he said, graciously, referring to Beatrice. "You must hasten matters, though. The marriage must take place soon," he concluded, sharply.

"That will be as Miss Rutherford pleases, I suppose," observed Reginald, quietly.

"Good heavens! do you not know that you are a pauper—that every hour of delay is fraught with danger? I have put this girl and her fortune within your grasp, and yet you cannot stretch forth your hand to take them!" he cried, bitterly.

"I cannot take until she is willing to give," was the slowly spoken answer.

"Are you a fool or a madman, sir," exclaimed Lord Roth, passionately, "that you let a girl's whim sway you? I tell you the marriage must take place soon."

Reginald looked at the stormy face with calm yet determined eyes.

"I will marry Beatrice Rutherford as soon as she will consent, because I love her; but, my lord, if I did not love her, or if I knew that she did not love me, I would not wed her to save you or myself from beggary. Understand that—understand, too, the reason that I submit to your choice of a wife for me."

He spoke deliberately, then turned and left the room, closing the door behind him. This stern tone of speech was habitual to Lord Roth when speaking to his son—the son on whom in the old days he had lavished almost womanly fondness.

Lord Roth leaned back in his chair and mused. He drew a sigh of relief as he remembered Reginald's last speech.

"He will marry her because he loves her. The end attained will be the fulfillment of my desire—that is well. Very soon now I shall be able to cast off this thralldom—to look upon these lands and say that they are free, unfettered. My dream is almost realized; before the leaves that now are green shall fade and fall, it will be a reality."

He went to the escritoire and took from a private drawer a slip of paper seamed with folds and yellow with time.

"It's a fair exchange—Adrian's daughter's money for the coronet I shall place in his hands to lay on her brow. And at last I shall rest in peace! At last—at last!"

He pressed his hand upon his brow and his lips grew ashy white.

"It's fair," he groaned aloud, as if battling with a secret thought; "they are satisfied—why should not I be? Is a demon to rise up within me and torture me with that sin, now that I am almost at peace? No, no, it cannot be!"

A sharp tap at the window, from the outside,

startled him. He closed the desk and drew aside the curtains. Some one was outside. Lord Roth thought it must be a servant. He opened the window, and a female figure stepped over the sill and stood before him.

"What do you want?" he asked, haughtily, for the intrusion amazed him.

"I want to speak with you, Lord Roth. Do you not know me? Look at me."

A cloak, drenched with rain, covered the woman's figure; a thick veil was tied over her head in lieu of a bonnet. Lord Roth looked straight into the eyes that met his own; then he tottered and grasped the curtain for support.

"Great Heaven! is it you?"

"Yes, it is I, Lord Roth; I have something to say to you."

"I wonder how long I can bear this!"

Beatrice leaned back in her father's carriage and asked herself the question. She was driving into Ickston to the art class. Georgie had a headache to-day, so Beatrice had to go alone. She was about to spend two dreamy, delicious hours near the man she loved as she should have loved Reginald Roth.

The School of Art, with its long, uncurtained windows, its bronzed and marble statues, had become a Paradise to the Squire's beautiful daughter. She did not quite know when it was that she first felt this fatal passion bringing such sadness into her life; but it was there—a dark shadow that was stealing the sunshine out of her existence.

She had promised to tell Georgie every secret; yet, night after night, the two sisters had sat together in the stillness of the starlight, and she had not dared to tell the secret of her infatuated love. She could imagine Georgie's hot, outspoken anger—her cool contempt for this swerving from her allegiance—Georgie who was so frank and honest, who hated falsehood, who loved Reginald Roth with so warm and sisterly a love that for his sake she would resent the cruel wrong Beatrice had done him in her heart.

It was a very pale and sad face that she carried into the marble portals of the Art School. It wanted half an hour yet to class time. The room was empty. She walked slowly past the row of easels until she reached the sunny window, separated by curtains from the rest of the room, where stood her own. Some one had been there. Her pencils lay ready, and on the table beside them a sheet of paper whereon was a pencilled, half-finished female head, and, partly hidden by the paper, a faded rose that had not yet lost its depth of tint.

She looked at them a moment curiously; then a hot blush dyed her cheeks and tingled in her fingertips. She laid one hand on the table and pressed the other on her forehead in an ecstasy of mingled shame and gladness. She knew the flower again; it was the one she had dropped from her breast on the morning of the picnic—the peculiar depth of its hue was still discernible.

"Why did he treasure it? Had this faded rose any value or beauty besides its own in his eyes?"

The tide of thoughts that came surging into her brain made her dizzy. Seizing her pencil, she set to work with nervous haste. She felt vaguely that she must work to keep herself from betraying the exultant thought that was making her heart beat so madly—"He loves me!"

A footstep sounded in the long-room—a measured footstep that came swiftly toward her recess, and then stopped. She knew, without lifting her head, that the curtains were withdrawn, and that some one was standing beside her. Then followed an exclamation:

"Miss Rutherford—you are early!"

There was a silence. Beatrice guided her pencil in hieroglyphical patterns. She knew that Mr. Noel's eyes were bent upon the faded flower and the crayon sketch; she knew, also, that he knew she had seen and understood.

Georgie Rutherford sat on a sofa in the drawing-room at the Reedes, feeling remarkably cross and sarcastic on account of her headache, when Captain Dare was announced. Georgie returned his greeting, and then prepared to leave the room and seek her father. Captain Dare interposed laughingly.

"No," he said, "my visit is to you."

Georgie sat down with a stormy face.

"How did you know that I had not gone to Ickston?" she asked, crossly.

"I drove my sisters over, and met your carriage returning. Your coachman kindly informed me that only Beatrix was gone, and that she would return with Mr. Roth."

Georgie looked severely indifferent.

"I have come to ask for your congratulations—"

He paused, looked keenly at the averted face, and observed the sudden flash of interest in it.

"I have come very unexpectedly into an estate in Ireland, through the sudden death of my cousin."

He paused again.

"I am happy to hear it," said Georgie.

"Georgie, it is no use to beat about the bush—I am going to Ireland soon, and I mean to take you with me. You must know that I love you very dearly. And I believe, in spite of your coolness, that you return my love. Now, Georgie, confess."

"I have nothing to confess. Release my hands, if you please," said Georgie, crossly.

"I can not be put off so, dear—it is a serious matter to me. I am anxious to get to Ireland. I will not go alone. How soon can you be ready?"

Captain Dare was certainly in earnest.

"Never!"

"You don't mean that," he said, gravely.

He held her hands firmly. The color rose under the olive skin at the last words, and the lips took a softer curve. Wise, yet wily Frank Dare seized the happy moment. He drew the little figure closer to him, and kissed the hot cheek.

"Will you marry me in a month's time, Georgie?"

Georgie flashed up.

"I am not sure that I shall marry at all, and, if I do, I shall not marry before Beatrix!"

"H'm!" Captain Dare paused to consider.

"Besides," continued Georgie, "I am very often disagreeable and ill tempered—worse than you can imagine; I bang doors and scold; I love my freedom, and resent the slightest interference with my whims and wishes. Do you think you could be happy with such a person?"

"Does your decision depend upon my reply?"

"Well, yes," vouchsafed Miss Georgie.

"Then I am very sure that I love your imperfections more than I shall ever love any other woman's virtues, my own little Georgie!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BETRAYED SECRET.

REGINALD ROTH drove his mail phaeton into Ickston that morning, on some trifling business. Entering the town, he met Squire Rutherford's coachman driving the empty carriage. Mr. Roth stopped to ask the man whither he was going.

"To the stables, sir. I am to call for Miss Rutherford at the School of Art, to take her home, at twelve."

"Miss Rutherford only—not Miss Georgina?"

"No, sir; only Miss Rutherford."

"Well, Ford, you may drive home at once; I will call for Miss Rutherford and bring her home myself," said Mr. Roth.

It was a common thing for Miss Rutherford to drive with Mr. Roth. Ford took the order as a matter of course, and obeyed it.

At the School of Art Reginald alighted. He meant to tell Beatrix of his intention. The room was empty, and he looked round for a moment. She must be at work at her easel. He knew the recess, veiled by curtains, where her easel stood, and went toward it.

His hand was on the curtain, when a man's voice

behind it, speaking in a low, grieved whisper, struck his ear.

"Dare I hope for pardon?" it said.

There was no reply. Reginald raised the curtain softly. Beatrix stood with bent head over the easel. Her golden, rippling hair swept the canvas and hid her face from the master, who stood at her side.

He bent forward and lifted the hair—the golden, rippling hair, every thread of which was worth a kingdom to the man looking on—and drew it back from the blushing, downcast face.

"Will you—can you forgive me and forget it? I have been mad. Believe me, I could not help it," pleaded the low, musical voice that was full of passion.

Still she made no answer, but stretched out her hand in silence. He took it, and bending down, pressed his lips upon it.

As one with horrible nightmare upon him, Reginald Roth dropped the curtain and went out. He mounted the phaeton, took the reins from the groom, and gave the horses their heads.

Afterward, looking back on that hour, he never could remember whether it rained or shone. He only knew that he was borne through the little town and out upon the high road at a mad pace. The groom, seated behind, grew uneasy—his master was evidently reckless and insensible to the dangerous pace that the horses were going. The wind blew in his face fresh and cool, but his brain seemed on fire; the blood coursed through his veins like molten lead, his heart was throbbing madly.

Had he dreamed of this thing, or was it true that the woman he loved with such blind adoration was false—that Beatrix—with whom he had associated all that was pure and perfect and beautiful—loved this man, yet suffered another to hold her in his arms and call her his own, and that other himself? When did she ever blush and tremble at his touch as she had done a moment since at that of his rival? Had she not laid her head on his breast, and lifted her face for his kisses, without the bloom on her perfect cheek growing deeper?

He asked himself these questions in his anguish, and sternly laid bare the truth to his own gaze—the bitter truth that bowed him to the dust. No, she had not loved him; she had let him love her more than his own life—she had accepted his worship and homage—and all the time her heart had been full of another man's image. He groaned in agony. He compressed his white lips with pain. Why was this thing come upon him? What had he done that he was crushed and made desolate for life?

"Heaven help me! This is more than I can bear!" he cried in his heart. "I may be blind—I may be mad; but from this hour I will never see her again—the sight of her face would kill me!"

Then from that noble, suffering heart another voice spoke and pleaded for her.

"Perhaps it is not her fault that he loves her. How can she help being so fair that men lose themselves and become dazzled before her beauty? If this man has dared to love her, that does not prove her false to me. Did she not say but yesterday that her love for me was strong enough to withstand any temptation of time or absence? Perhaps I have been too hasty—too swift to condemn her. If I love her so, ought I not to trust her fully—to believe in her truth against all the world? Yes, I have been mad and jealous."

So was he tossed to and fro by distracting doubts and fears and hopes.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LACE-WOMAN'S VISITOR.

BEATRIX sat alone in her dressing-room; the sunshine flooding through the rose-colored curtains, fell upon her as she sat. Upon her cheeks burned a hot flush, upon her brows lay a shadow—a shadow of some untold pain.

A few moments ago Georgie had left her, after pouring into her sister's ears the sweet story of her

happy love. Beatrix had listened attentively, had whispered her words of sympathy, had kissed Georgie's glowing cheek, while all the time her own brain was dizzy, her own heart aching beneath the weight of suffering—for during the long watches of the past night, as she lay awake and restless, there had come to her the full consciousness of what she was doing—of what she had done. She was acting a base and sinful part—so base that Beatrix Rutherford hid her proud eyes from the daylight, and moaned in her pain as she confessed it to herself.

In those moments of bliss when she had first learned that the man for whom she had been false to her affianced husband returned her love, she had given herself up to the delirious joy that the knowledge awakened in her heart, forgetful of all else. With calmer thoughts came the full sense of her error.

She paced the sunny room again and again, trying to decide upon the right course to pursue. There was but one—she must break her engagement with Reginald Roth! For the rest—what?

She dared not face the future—she put it out of her thoughts; for the present this was enough—she must dissolve her engagement with Reginald Roth.

Even this decision brought some comfort—poor comfort, truly, yet it was better than battling with a chaos of doubts, and hopelessly sealing her fate for life. She felt feverish, her pulses throbbed, her cheeks were burning. If she could go somewhere—do something to get away for a brief time—away from Georgie and her parents, whose loving eyes would soon discern the change in her face. She cast about in her mind for an excuse, and almost without an effort one presented itself to her.

The lace-woman for whom "he" had solicited her aid! Beatrix had already been once to see her—a strange woman, with something foreign in her words and looks, but accomplished in her art. Beatrix had commissioned her to make a quantity of lace, more from a wish to aid her than from any necessity for it. The thought entered her mind that it would be a good excuse for a long, solitary drive, to go and see whether the lace was finished.

She rung the bell and ordered the pony-carriage; then she put a black lace shawl over her white dress, tied a veil round the brim of her small coquettish hat, and waited in a fever of impatience.

The chaise was announced. She glided downstairs, and across the hall. Fortunately she met no one. A groom held the reins, and was waiting to accompany his young mistress.

"I shall not want you, Russell; I am going alone."

The man delivered the reins and whip to her, and she drove away, taking a circuitous route to Ickston. She did not wish to meet any one. The Dare girls might be riding or driving on the high-road; Beatrix dreaded an interview with them just now, engrossed as she knew they were with Frank's engagement to Georgie. It was a long drive, but it did not fatigue her. The air cooled her cheeks and calmed her throbbing pulses.

The lace-woman occupied the attic of Derby Lodge, Mr. Noel occupied the lower rooms of the same house. Ickston seemed asleep when she entered it. The quiet little town was at tea at this early hour in the afternoon. As she drove past the School of Art, the quickening throbs of her heart sent the color with a rush into her face. By the time she reached Derby Lodge she was tranquil again.

A boy was coming down the street carrying milk-cans. She called him as he passed, and asked him to hold her ponies. Then she walked up the primitive "front garden" and rung the bell of Derby Lodge, trying to subdue a little thrill of joy as the possibility of meeting Mr. Noel flashed across her mind.

Upon the occasion of her first visit to Derby Lodge Reginald Roth had accompanied her, and then—oh, blissful recollection!—they had encountered the

artist in the gloomy hall. But that was more than a week ago, and—

The door opened with a creaking noise. Miss Rutherford found herself face to face with Mr. Noel's neat landlady, Mrs. Flaherty.

"The poor sowl is betther to-day, though uncommon thrying to a body's timper, ma'am," replied Mrs. Flaherty, in answer to Beatrix's inquiry.

"I will go up and see her," said she, quietly; and Mrs. Flaherty's dumpling form preceded her up the three flights of stairs leading to the attic. On the topmost stair the landlady stopped.

"Perhaps you won't mind going in alone, my-lady, for the poor crathure is just as obstreperous as can be, and can't bear the sight of me, though goodness knows I've niver a thought but kindness in my heart for her," whispered Mrs. Flaherty, energetically.

Miss Rutherford smiled and turned the handle of the attic door. Before her was a clean and comfortable room, bare of furniture, save for the narrow bed and a rickety rocking-chair. A small fire, which the sunlight shamed, burned in a tiny stove. Before it, with a gay-colored shawl twisted about her shoulders, sat the lace-woman. She lifted her head as her visitor entered, and a spasm of pain passed over her haggard face.

"I am come to see you again, as I promised," said Beatrix, gently. "I am sorry to see you so ill."

"You need not be sorry. I am not ill, though they all say so," she answered, raising a pair of angry eyes to the girl's face.

"Are you not? I thought—"

"You thought I was dying? You are mistaken—they are all mistaken. But time will prove—time will prove."

Beatrix was silent; the fierce and agonized tones jarred upon her. She felt herself powerless to deal with this half-crazed creature, whom she had promised Mr. Noel to befriend. Suddenly she thought of the lace, and asked for it. It was not finished, but Beatrix spent some time admiring and commenting upon its beauty. She also drew the taciturn woman to speak of other things—trivial things—never touching upon herself or her former life, about which Beatrix felt constrained to wonder.

The afternoon sunlight fell upon the two, clothing with ineffable glory the faded form of the lace-woman and the radiantly lovely girl who was the one bright object in the bare, whitewashed room. She rose at length to go.

"I wish you would let me send you something to tempt you to eat," she said, in her sweet voice, every tone of which fell on the poor worn heart as dew on a parched and wasted land.

The wistful eyes for once lost their fierceness.

"Thank you," she answered, wearily. Then, with a sudden impulse, she asked: "Is he waiting downstairs for you?"

"He? Who?" questioned Beatrix, in a tone of wonder.

"The man you are going to marry—Mr. Roth. You are going to marry him, are you not?"

The color died from Beatrix's cheeks and lips, the light dimmed in her eyes, as the woman's blunt words bared her sorrow to the daylight. Her voice trembled a little, but she answered, haughtily:

"Mr. Roth is not waiting for me; I came alone."

The *hauteur* was lost upon her listener—a fit of dreamy unconsciousness was upon her face.

"Tell him not to forget his promise," she said, musingly.

"His promise? I do not understand," said Beatrix, more gently.

"Do you not? He said that, if ever he could serve me in any way, he would. He said it when he was here with you that day—you heard him say so, although you have forgotten."

"Yes, I had forgotten," replied Beatrix, drearily.

"But I have not. Do you think he has forgotten?" the woman questioned, eagerly. "He said 'in any way' he would serve me—in any way."

"I am sure he has not forgotten—Mr. Roth is very kind," Miss Rutherford said, in unsteady tones.

She got away at last. The drive home seemed a long torture. Just as she had longed to get away from her home, so now she longed to reach it.

In the hall she met her mother. Mrs. Rutherford entered upon a detailed account of the afternoon's doings. Mrs. Dare and the girls had paid a visit of ecstatic congratulations concerning Frank and Georgie. Beatrix listened patiently, and contributed her mite to the general satisfaction.

"How well Beattie looks!" said Mrs. Rutherford, complacently, rejoining Georgie in the drawing-room after Beatrix was gone up stairs.

And Beatrix had locked her door, and fallen upon her knees by a couch, where, with her face hidden, she spent part of her heart-ache in bitter tears!

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. FLAHERTY'S GOSSIP.

MRS. FLAHERTY had set Mr. Noel's tea service, made his tea, placed the steaming urn upon the tray, and cut the sponge-cake, surveying its mellow richness with conscious pride. She had even gathered fresh flowers—roses, heartsease, and mignonne—from her little garden, and placed them upon his table. The good lady had a tender spot in her heart for the young artist who occupied her best parlor. As Mrs. Flaherty gave the table-cloth a final smoothing, a sudden thought struck her.

"I wonder what's become of that little ivory butter-knife he used to be so fond of," she mused, casting a contemplative glance round the apartment, and then proceeding to turn out the drawers of the chiffonier in search of the butter-knife. It was not in the first drawer, nor in the second. In the third Mrs. Flaherty lighted upon something that gave her a greater shock than if she had sprung a gold mine. It was a woman's head in water-colors—exquisitely colored, perfectly finished. The blue eyes looked straight into her own as she took the portrait in her hand and recognized it.

"If that is not Miss Rutherford as I live! In his drawer, with his gloves and things! Poor fellow! He's in love with her. Sure that's a thousand pities—and she so rich, going to be Lady Roth, too! Sure I'm sorry!"

She replaced the drawing and sat down in Mr. Noel's easy-chair to try to devise some means of curing that gentleman's ill-advised passion.

Mr. Noel, entering the room some half-hour later, was amazed to find Mrs. Flaherty in his arm-chair fast asleep. He went to the window and stood by the elaborate flower-stand. His face wore a tired and harassed expression in the full light of the July sunset. He stood so a long time, in a half-sweet, half-bitter reverie, till Mrs. Flaherty awoke and poured forth a torrent of lamentations and apologies for having so inopportunistically "forgotten herself" and suffered the urn to get off the boil. She waited upon him with eager solicitude, and secretly mourned that he was so indifferent to the charms of lemon-cake. As she filled his second cup of tea she plunged into the subject that lay so sore a burden at her heart.

"Miss Rutherford came here one day last week, sir, and Mr. Roth." She noted the slight change of color and compression of the lips; then she went on. "Sure I felt so strange at seeing them both so grand and tall, when it seems like yesterday that they was little things playing together."

"Have you known Miss Rutherford so long?" he asked, surprised.

"Oh, yes, sir, though I don't suppose she remembered me. I've known them ever since they could walk. I was housemaid at the Hall before I married Mike Flaherty, and Mike's cousin Rachel was nurse, or something like it, to Master Reginald. I remember the day Miss Beattie and Master Reginald was christened as well as possible. The Squire was always so full of his fun, and after the christening he and Lord Roth had the children in the drawing-room,

and made up a plan to marry them to each other. Rachel held Master Reginald, so she knew all about it. I've heard her say how them two gentlemen signed a paper, and made a great to do with their nonsense."

She looked at her hearer. He was leaning his arms on the table and listening intently.

"So, you see, sir, those two have belonged to each other always," continued Mrs. Flaherty with well-assumed innocence. "But afterward Miss Beattie went to France, and his Lordship took her Ladyship and Master Reginald abroad, and the Hall was shut up. Rachel went too—she was maid to Lady Roth. They meant to come back in a year or two, but things turned out different."

"Then they did not return for a longer period?" said Mr. Noel, absorbed.

"Lady Roth never returned, sir, nor my husband's cousin Rachel. The news came that the poor lady was dead in Italy, and that Lord Roth was going to live abroad till his son came of age. The next we heard was that Rachel had married some foreign man, and sent money home for her old mother to come out with the child and live with her.

"The child?"

"Yes, sir—Rachel's boy. Rachel was a widow when she went out with the Roths. She left her only child in the care of her mother. Afterward, when she married the foreigner, she sent for them, and they went out to Italy. And never a tale or tidings came over the sea to tell what became of them all. My lord and Mr. Reginald returned to Rothbury in the spring, a little time before Miss Beattie came home. I heard she was a very beautiful young lady; and sure enough, when I saw her face the other day, I knew it was the truth. I've heard they are to be married soon; in the autumn, folks say. No more tea, sir? Then I'll take the pot away."

She gathered the things together on the tray, and carried it out, making a bustle, and feigning not to see the rigid face turned to the window.

"I hove done it," the old lady said, triumphantly to herself. "It's a hard blow for the poor dear, but it's better he should know she has belonged to somebody else all her life."

He sat on where she had left him, his head bowed on his hands.

"She has belonged to him always—she will be his wife. His wife—and I love her so! Why did I come here—why did I not die before I saw her face—the fair face that was only meant for him, yet has drawn my very senses from me, and made my life a curse—that I would have sacrificed my life to possess, and the memory of which will haunt me till I die!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A WOMAN'S REMORSE.

REGINALD ROTH had shut himself in his private room at Rothcourt, and there in the solitude he stood face to face with his unexpected trial.

Long and fiercely he battled with his sore heart, asking himself what he ought to do—whether it would be right to release Beatrix at once from the ties that bound her to himself, or whether he should hide the fatal knowledge he had acquired in his own heart, and allow their relations to each other to continue as they stood at present, unless Beatrix herself dissolved them. He concluded that the latter was the only course open to him for the present. He shrunk from the idea of openly taxing her with her falsehood. Suppose, after all, blinded by his jealousy, he had made a mistake in believing her false? At the bottom of his heart there lay a faint hope that it might be so; and, in spite of the evidence of his own eyes, in spite of what his better judgment told him, the hope lived on.

He had set himself a difficult task. He would have to see Beatrix daily in her home, to spend hours in her society, to touch her hand and kiss her

him as he had been wont to do. How could he do all this, and do it as though no terrible doubt lay at his heart? Yet he resolved to do it. He nerved himself for the struggle of his love against his honor, and found one little ray of comfort by telling himself that, were Beatrix really false, the trial would be a short one, for the Beatrix he had loved was and must be, too truthful to hide her secret long.

He spent the weary July afternoon in his darkened room; then he dined with his father, purposing to ride over to the Reedes as usual, and pass the evening with the Squire's family. Had he not been so absorbed by his own affairs he would have noticed the change that had come over his father since the day of the picnic—a change that could not be described, but that was painfully apparent. A strange restlessness pervaded his manner. He cast from time to time glances of nervous terror about the room, as though in dread of some unseen presence. His voice was scarcely raised above a whisper, and he seemed possessed in a more than ordinary degree by a desire for solitude.

The meal passed in unbroken silence; when it was over, Reginald mounted his horse and rode over to the Reedes. It was just after sunset when he reached the drive; he dismounted on the lawn, and delivered the animal to his servant who had accompanied him—a dark, wiry little man with black locks sprinkled with gray, the Italian of whom Georgie had spoken to Beatrix.

Reginald Roth entered the drawing-room by the window; he had often done so before. The Squire had fallen asleep in an easy-chair, Mrs. Rutherford was not in the room, nor was Florence. Georgie sat in one of the windows, Frank Dare at her side. At the further end of the long room Beatrix sat at the piano, her white dress showing clearly through the dim twilight that shrouded her end of the apartment.

After speaking to Georgie, Reginald crossed over to Beatrix. She scarcely moved from her position when he drew near; and it was too dark for him to see her face. She went on playing one of those dreamy delicious "songs without words" that she had so often before played for him.

He sat down by the piano, for suddenly there arose within him an almost uncontrollable desire to clasp her to his heart in a passionate embrace, and while looking into her eyes, to entreat—to implore her to reveal the truth—to save him by telling him that she loved him still, or to let him lie down at her feet and die. He drew a deep breath while the spasm lasted. From the open conservatory close by came delicious odors that filled the room with a faint perfume. The twilight grew deeper—from afar Georgie's low rippling laughter, blent with Frank's happy tones, came to Reginald's ears—near him the melody of Mendelssohn's music floated on the perfumed air; and still he sat on, feeling as one in a dream, with the face he loved so madly beaming like an angel's through the darkness.

The music ending broke the spell. Beatrix laid her hand upon his arm.

"Reginald, let us go into the garden for a little while."

He rose in silence. She led the way through the conservatory out upon the lawn.

"I want to speak to you," she said, suddenly.

His heart almost ceased to beat. He felt the hand upon his arm tremble. Then she spoke, every tone of her voice seeming to tell the truth of his earthly hopes.

"Reginald, you said once that you would hold my happiness as precious as your own honor—as more precious than your life. I know you spoke the truth for you are as noble as you are good, Reginald. The time has come that I must ask you to do as you then promised—make a sacrifice for my sake."

The words were slowly spoken, but falteringly. He made no answer, and she went on.

"We were to belong to each other always, Regi-

nald. At one time I was glad that it was to be so; now, for both our sakes, I must say the words that shall part us. Do you hear, Reginald? We must part now forever. You and I must not meet again."

Still he made no answer. His agonized eyes were fixed upon her white face.

"I do not ask you to be a friend to me. I know your love for me is too deep to accept anything else from me than love as true and deep. Heaven knows I would give it you if I could! My own heart feels broken because of the grief I feel for you—it bleeds when I think of the pain I am giving you; yet it were better that I should tell you this, for both our sakes."

Her words were more rapidly uttered now. They fell from lips that were quivering with suppressed emotion.

"Reginald, forgive me! I have acted wrong; but it is not all my fault. I would have withheld it if I could, but it came unbidden into my heart and my life—this love for another. It has broken my dream of happiness—it will make my future life a long torture, for it is utterly hopeless; I do not even know that it is returned. See, Reginald—I lay my very soul bare to you! Speak to me—tell me that you forgive me, or I shall die! If I have caused you pain, I am punished a thousandfold more bitterly."

Her voice was choked with sobs that shook her whole frame; and, perceiving that she was almost fainting, Reginald caught her in his arms.

Yes, he could see her misery; it did not need her words to tell him how she suffered; she had said truly, her own punishment was great. He raised her head tenderly, reverently; he kept his arms round her—for she could not stand—but he did not press her close to him—she was his no longer. Then he spoke, slowly and sadly:

"There is nothing for me to forgive, Beatrix; you have not wronged me willingly. I will keep the vow I made. For your sake I would sacrifice all but my honor; if the sacrifice will not purchase your happiness, my sorrow for you will be deeper than my sorrow for myself. You are, and ever will be, my heart's first thought."

"Heaven bless you for that!" she exclaimed, fervently. "Oh, Reginald, the greatest bitterness in my future life will be the memory of what you have suffered through me!"

She was still weeping bitterly; her tears wrung his heart. He would willingly have suffered yet more had it been possible to save her this.

"I wish I could die—I wish I could die! To think that my dream of happiness has ended thus!" she moaned.

He stood very still till she grew calmer and lifted her eyes to his pallid face.

"Go, Reginald—leave me to my fate; I must learn to bear my sorrow alone," she whispered, mournfully. "Oh, Reginald, if I dared hope that you could forget me in loving some one worthy of you, I could bear my trial better."

"Hush," he answered, passionately; "that can never be. My love for you will end only with my death."

She bowed her head to hide the pain that passed over her face.

"Farewell, Beatrix—farewell forever!"

She lifted her face while he bent his own passionately upon it, holding her close—close for the last time.

It was late when Georgie Rutherford went into Beatrix's dressing-room for the little chat that the sisters usually indulged in before retiring for the night. She was startled to see Beatrix kneeling by the couch, with her face hidden. To kneel beside her and lay a caressing hand upon her shoulder was Georgie's first impulse.

"Is anything the matter, darling?"

The only reply was a deep sob.

"Why are you weeping, Beatrix? Will you not tell me? Do you remember your promise to hide

nothing from me? I told you my secret, you know, Beattie."

Beatrice rose to her feet with sudden strength. She looked in her sister's face with the courage of despair.

"It will not be a secret long," she said. "I have broken my engagement with Reginald Roth—I think I have broken his heart, too! Do not look at me so or I shall go mad! I am the most sinful and miserable woman that ever lived. You will all hate me, but not so fiercely as I hate myself."

Georgie heard the bitter words with mingled anger and astonishment.

"Broken your engagement with Reginald!" she exclaimed. "You must be mad, Beatrice—I cannot believe it!"

"All the world will know it soon," was the sad reply.

"What possessed you, Beatrice? Have you quarreled? If so, that can soon be mended. Reginald is the noblest man living—he will not be angry long."

"He is too noble, too good for me. He is not angry, but we parted forever," Beatrice said, mournfully.

There was a pause, which was broken by the younger girl.

"I cannot understand it. What will papa say?"

Beatrice lifted her face in sudden terror, and then she knelt before her sister.

"I dare not tell him," she whispered. "Oh, Georgie, for Heaven's sake, help me! Tell them all, and ask them to send me away until your marriage day is over; I could not live through it. Let me go away with my misery. Oh, that I had never come among you—that I had never been born!"

Georgie's tears were flowing fast as she looked at the miserable girl whom but two months ago she had deemed the most favored of fortune's children.

"Let me go, Beatrice," she said, rising; "I must try to realize what has happened. Would that I could go to sleep and wake up to find it all a dream!" She turned away, and then paused to ask, suddenly: "You have not told me why you have done this, Beatrice—may I know?"

Beatrice went to her sister and clasped her neck.

"Listen," she said—"I will tell it to you."

Georgie bent her head to catch the low and agonized whisper.

"My poor Beatrice, my own dear sister!" was her pitiful exclamation. All the severity was gone from her tone, her resentment was swallowed up in her compassion. She stroked the golden hair lovingly.

"Does Reginald know?" she questioned, after a time.

"Yes. He had a right to know; I told him all. I have acted wrong all through. I allowed Reginald and all of you to think that I would be his wife, yet for some time I have known that it could never be. Oh, my sister, what have I not suffered since the fatal knowledge of my secret came to me!"

There was no answer, save an increased tenderness in the touch of Georgie's hand as it rested on Beatrice's hair.

"Dear Georgie, you must tell our parents for me. Do not ask for their pity or forgiveness. I dare not hope for either. Ask them to let me go away for a long time, till they have almost forgotten me and my fault, and you are married. Then I will come back, but oh, so humble, Georgie! I will try to fill your place to them; they can never be proud of me again, but perhaps they will not be ashamed of me."

There was such weary agony in the tone that Georgie wept bitterly.

"My poor darling sister!" was all she could say. Then she dried her tears, and with gentle firmness helped Beatrice to bed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DRIVEN BY DESPAIR.

LORD ROTH continued to pile up *chateaux en Espagne*, and dream golden dreams in the somber

library at the Hall, till one ill-fated evening, when a few words from Reginald put an end to it forever.

It was a sultry night, and Reginald had been pacing the terrace since dinner, thinking of his wrecked happiness. His heart was heavy enough, both for Beatrice's sake and his own. Since the day when he had seen Beatrice and the young artist together, until this last week, he had been in a vague, bewildering dream, hoping, doubting, fearing. Then had come the fearful awakening. Now he was learning to bear his trial—not merely to endure it but to face it like the brave, strong, noble man he was.

He was pondering in his mind whether this lesson would not come to him easier away from Rothcourt—easier to Beatrice too. It would not be right for her to leave her home so soon after her return, yet one of them must go to avoid the constant meetings, the chance encounters, that would henceforth be so painful for both. Yes, he would go away. His going would make no difference to any one. The intercourse between himself and Lord Roth was so slight that the latter would scarcely miss him.

The voice of his father, speaking in querulous tones, broke upon his meditations. Lord Roth stood just within the open window; Reginald paused just without to reply.

"When is it to be? How much longer am I to wait, sir?"

"To wait? For what, my lord?" asked the young man, dreamily.

"For your marriage, sir. Have I not told you that this delay is fraught with peril—that, unless Miss Rutherford's money, or money from some other quarter, is soon in your hands, we—the Roths of Rothcourt—shall be beggars?" he answered, irritably.

It struck Reginald now for the first time that he had forgotten even to tell his father of Beatrice's refusal. He had known it since yesterday, yet he had not uttered it save to his own heart. Now, too, for the first time, a feeling of something like dread possessed him as the sudden thought entered his mind of how his father would receive this news. He was not one to flinch from any task, or to be mastered by any trouble, so he drew a hard breath and met this one face to face.

"The marriage will never take place," he said, quietly; "Miss Rutherford has rejected me."

The words fell upon the other's ears as words spoken in a strange language might fall.

"I do not understand you, sir," he said, coldly.

Reginald repeated firmly:

"Miss Rutherford has refused to become my wife."

"Refused—refused!" echoed Lord Roth, with a long pause between the words. "She does not dare to refuse!"

"You forget, my lord," the younger man said, calmly, "that there was nothing binding in the compact, that you and Mr. Rutherford made between us."

"I cannot understand," he muttered; then contemptuously, "It must be, sir, I tell you—it is nothing but a woman's whim. What reason does she give for this temporary insanity?"

Reginald met the angry gaze calmly.

"That is between herself and me, my lord," he replied, haughtily, and turned away. A sharp imperative command recalled him.

"Come back, sir."

They stood face to face in the summer twilight that was not dense enough to hide the tempest of angry passions upon the countenance of the one or the calm endurance of the other.

"Look in my face and answer me solemnly as before heaven. Is this thing false or true?" asked Lord Roth in a hoarse whisper.

"I have said."

A moment of silence, like the lull before the bursting of the tempest, and then the other spoke.

"Twenty years I have waited for this thing to

come to pass; for it I have sacrificed my honor, stained my hands with sin, borne up against debt and poverty and subterfuges to exist from day to day: and now you let a woman's whim lay my hopes, my plans, my very life all in the dust! This is what your base blood has done for me! I might have known that I could not gather figs of thorns. Go now from my presence—all is at an end between us—your face goads me to madness. Go, and take my bitterest curse with you to the ends of the earth."

With folded arms Reginald leaned against the stone pillar and listened. The suppressed agony and bitter hatred in the tone thrilled through his whole being. Some of the words struck him as strange. Soon—very soon—their meaning lay before him and he understood.

He turned and walked away in silence—anywhere—over the lawn—among the shrubs. A new pain was at his heart, another agony to do battle with.

"When has he ever regarded me, his son, save as the instrument of his own schemes—the blind tool by means of which his plans were to be wrought out?" he cried out, in his hot anger and misery. "Can I recall one tender word or look such as a father gives to son, man to man? I believe, if my blood would buy the gold he covets, he would see it shed greedily—my base blood, he said—he, my father! Does he forget that I too am a man and his equal, though not held by him in greater honor than the servants under his roof?"

He walked rapidly to and fro, crushing the turf with his impetuous steps, his teeth set as he spoke his thoughts aloud.

"Yes, it will be best so. I will take Carlo and leave Rothcourt—I will travel—go to Germany and give lessons in my own language, music, or Heaven knows what, for a living. Anywhere will be better than here—any work preferable to the shame of this false existence. I shall be better away from it—away from her. As for the rest, I shall never need a meal if Carlo is my companion."

So he thought and planned. But he would not go away from Rothcourt this very hour, as he meant to do—no, not just yet.

Lord Roth stood where Reginald had left him. The wrath, the mad passion that had but now possessed him was subsiding, the high tension of nerve was relaxing, and in place of it came a gloomy despair almost as terrible. As Reginald's last steps died away, the elder man threw up his arms—and it was well there was no eye to gaze on his face.

"So near—so near; and I have lost—lost all!" With a loud and bitter cry, he fell forward upon his face.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STRANGE CALL.

LORD ROTH was not dead. Reginald's old Italian servant, passing round the grounds to the rear of the house, heard the cry and the heavy fall, and ran to the terrace, whence the sound seemed to proceed. The twilight was thick now. He peered about among the plants and pillars; finally, he stepped in at the drawing-room window, and saw within it the dark heap. He rung the bell violently, and, before any one could answer the summons, he had raised the fallen head, and loosened the fastenings at the throat.

The old nobleman was not dead, but nearly so. Lord Roth had burst a blood-vessel. His whole countenance was transformed almost beyond recognition. Carlo Marini was a sharp and expert man. He had been almost everywhere, seen almost everything, had engaged in various trades, and knocked about the world from his infancy. He never knew his parentage, never owned a birth-place, never, till fate threw him in Reginald Roth's path, heard himself addressed as anything better than a dog. In his peregrinations he had picked up a singular medley of knowledge, as varied as it was

useful. Reginald had said truly that he should never need a meal if Carlo Marini was his fellow wanderer.

His keen eyes read at once the danger and the cause. He dispatched one of the servants to Ickston for the doctor, and another for Mr. Roth. For the rest, he took matters into his own hands, and managed well.

Reginald came into the room, upon the threshold of which he and his father had parted but half an hour before. He was shocked deeply, and looked with pity and with awe at the altered face of the man whose last words to him had been a curse. They waited in restless impatience for the doctor. He came at last, and afterward spoke to Lord Roth's son with courteous sympathy. "His lordship was in considerable danger, and would continue so for some days. The issue could not at present be foreseen: meanwhile his lordship must be kept perfectly tranquil."

Reginald heard, and attended the issue. He must wait until his father was out of danger before he left Rothcourt.

The following day brought the Squire, his wife, and Georgie to Rothcourt. They were deeply shocked—most of all, at the change in the young man's face since they had seen him last only two days ago. Even while he answered their inquiries in the grave way habitual to him, he was wondering whether they knew all—whether Beatrix was happy again, or still white and sad as he had seen her last—whether she had thought of him since they had parted. It seemed a lifetime to him since then.

After the ladies had bidden him a kind good-by, the Squire lingered.

"Heaven is my witness that I am truly grieved for this, Reggy," he said, laying one hand on the young man's shoulder, and looking with grieved eyes into his sad face.

Reginald met the look. It moved him strangely. Mr. Rutherford knew all.

"My boy, we have looked forward to it all our lives—your father and I. We gave you to each other at the beginning, Reggy. We should not have complained if death had intervened, or even if Beatrix had said at the first that the arrangement could never be. But for a girl's whim to break up the plan we had nursed for twenty years is hard to bear. Heaven alone knows what she has done it for; she has deceived us all as I never dreamed a daughter of mine could have done. I am an old man, my boy, but I am sorely disappointed; I have not forgiven her—I cannot forgive her," he added, sternly.

Reginald turned away.

"You must forgive Beatrix," he said, earnestly. "I forgave her when she told me all."

"Is it so little to you?" the Squire asked, hastily, almost angrily.

He repented the words before they were well uttered. Never, never, in all the years to come, did he forget the look on the young man's face as he turned it to him.

"It is so much to me," he answered, slowly and passionately, "that I count all other grief as nothing in comparison. It is so much to me that the pain of it will last while I live. But her happiness is counted before all that this world can give to me. To purchase that, I would reckon no sacrifice too great; so I have forgiven her."

"Forgive me too," the Squire said, meekly, and held out his hand, while great tears filled his blue eyes. "What a noble fellow he is! What a true heart the girl has thrown away! Heaven forgive her—I cannot!" he added to himself, and sternly hardened his heart against the girl who had been mad enough to reject Reginald Roth.

There came a time when Lord Roth was pronounced out of danger—as much out of danger as he would ever be. One thread of the strong life was snapped forever; so he lay in dreamy unconsciousness, heeding nothing, caring for nothing,

All anxiety for him was over just now. The hot impassioned heart beat very slowly, the scheming, toiling brain was quiet for a time.

Reginald lived on in dull monotonous routine. Vague scraps of news floated from the outer world into his solitude. He had heard that Frank Dare had left England for Belfast, to stay some weeks in Ireland, so as to set his estate in order before he brought his bride home. He had learned, too, that Mrs. Dare and the girls had gone to spend the remainder of the summer at the seaside, taking Beatrix Rutherford with them.

It seemed to him as if his life had stopped suddenly, yet a sense of waiting for something pervaded his whole being. He had a dim perception of some great crisis being at hand. The first shadow of the coming event was in the shape of a sealed note, somewhat oddly addressed, which the old Italian placed in his hands one afternoon. The contents ran thus:—

"HONORED SIR: Begging you will remember making a promise to come to the poor crazed creature in my house, if ever she wanted you, I make bold to send her message, which I thought you would never understand if I did not explain, and hoping you will excuse the liberty taken by your faithful servant,

"MARY FLAHERTY."

Inside the note lay a slip of paper, upon which was written, in large black characters, the single word "Come."

He did not hesitate a moment; he remembered his promise to the strange woman—he remembered that Beatrix had been interested in and kind to her. He rung the bell, and Carlo Marini answered it.

"Bring my horse round," he said—"I am going into Ickston."

CHAPTER XX.

REVEALED AT LAST.

MRS. FLAHERTY'S strange lodger was sitting upright in her bed when Mr. Roth entered the top room of Derby Lodge upon that July evening. An old gay-patterned shawl was wrapped tightly round her shoulders; her gray but still abundant hair was loosely confined by a beautiful comb of foreign workmanship. As Mr. Roth entered she leaned back against her pillows with a composed expression upon her face.

"I thought you would keep your promise," she said. "Sit down—I have a story to tell you. When I have told it, I shall have lost a good friend and gained—" She paused, looking at him wistfully.

"I am your friend always," Reginald put in, kindly.

"Hush," she answered; "you are one who does not break a promise easily. I do not want you to make one that you cannot keep. Wait until the end."

Then she lay silent for a while, with a far-away look in her eyes as they rested on the strip of sky visible from the tiny window. The silence lasted so long that Reginald began to wonder, when suddenly she moved her head and began to speak, looking full at him.

"The story begins twenty years or more ago. You are very troubled about something, Mr. Roth, I see it in your face, which is much changed since I saw it last. I can guess your trouble—it is about the beautiful young lady that you love. You think there is no grief so deep as yours, I suppose—that in all the world there has never been so sad a heart as your own. But there are stories in the hearts of some men and women that you would weep to hear, brave man though you are. I am going to tell you one such—a story of men's and women's heartaches, and passions, and wild jealousies, and sufferings that were ended before you were born.

"At the time I speak of I was a young woman—I am not an old one now, although I may seem so to you. Well, in those days I was mad enough to love a man whose position should have been an impass-

able gulf between myself and him; but I was a foolish girl, and my eyes were blinded by my love and folly. I loved Lord Roth."

She went on speaking rapidly, and did not heed the astonished look in her hearer's eyes.

"I loved in vain. Although I forgot that he was a gentleman and I a farmer's daughter, he did not. I don't think he knew my secret, for he had no thought save for his cousin, Charlotte Berney. She was to be his wife, and her wealth was to lift the Roths from the poverty and ruin into which their extravagance had led them. She never became his wife. There was a misunderstanding between them, and Lord Roth married another lady—Miss Noel—in haste and anger. He married her because she was rich, and because he wanted an heir to keep the property in his own branch of the family. He never loved his wife, and, when he found one day that the fortune she was to have had was lost by the ruin of her father, I think he hated her.

"I was married, too, then, but I was a widow before my son was born. Soon after that Lord Roth was given the heir he had longed for—a son was born to Lady Roth. I asked to be allowed to nurse the little heir, and I went to live at Rothcourt for that purpose. It was agreed between Lord Roth and Squire Rutherford that the little heir should marry the squire's daughter when the two were old enough.

"About three or four years after Lady Roth was so delicate that the family went abroad for her health. I only of the servants went too. I left my own child at home with my mother, for I thought to return after a year or two. We went to a beautiful place a few miles from Naples. Lady Roth did not get better. I knew why, and—Heaven forgive me for it!—I was glad that her heart was broken for love of the man who had almost broken mine. She knew her husband hated her, and she worshiped him. I tried to increase her misery by every careless word and act of his I could recall. I told her that Lord Roth had loved his cousin, and my heart beat for joy when I heard that Charlotte Berney was in Naples. I wanted Lady Ellen to see them together—to see how her husband loved his cousin; I wanted her to suffer because she had married the man I loved.

"I had my desire. Her face as it looked in those days has haunted me night and day ever since. I knew the anguish that was wasting her very life away, yet I did not repent that I had added to it. May Heaven forgive me for all she suffered then!

"There was a young Neapolitan—a fisherman—who lived near us. I got acquainted with him, and I grew to like him. I liked him at first because he was exceedingly beautiful, and I worshiped beauty—I liked him afterward because he had a true and good heart, and laid it at my feet. When he asked me to marry him, I said 'Yes.' If the Roths had been going back to England, I should have said 'No,' and returned to my mother and my child. As they were likely to remain for years abroad, I thought it would be good for me to have a home of my own. So I sent for my mother to come out and bring the child with her, to live with me and Antonio in Italy.

"One day trouble came to Lord Roth—money difficulties—and Miss Berney offered to help him. I think her kindness showed Lord Roth all that he had lost, and made him mad. He forgot himself, and fell at her feet in a moment of uncontrollable passion. I heard all that they said: I heard him cry out that he loved her—that his life without her was intolerable. She was very calm, and behaved as grandly as it was her wont to do always.

"Lady Ellen heard too. If I had wondered at her patience before, I thought she was a saint when she entered the room after Miss Berney had left, and tried to comfort her husband. She was willing to forgive him—to shut her eyes to the wrong he had done her; she only saw that he was in great grief, and needed comfort.

"He rose up and answered: his bitter words, his taunts, his upbraidings pierced her very heart. I saw the agony in her face as she left him—and for the first time there was something more than agony. If he had known what he was doing, I think even he would have held his passion in check.

"That day little Master Reginald had not seemed very well. He came to me as I was packing up my things—I was going for a fortnight's holiday to Antonio's friends in Naples—and I noticed that the child's face was flushed, that his eyes were unusually brilliant. I thought that he looked as if he were going to be ill, and that I had better put off my holiday. I went to Lady Roth. She was in her chamber. I knew what had happened; so I pretended not to notice her strange expression as she stood by a writing-table in the darkened chamber.

"She answered me in a hard, sharp tone such as I had never heard her use before. She said she would see to Reggy herself—the child had a slight cold—I was not to delay my visit to Naples. So I went. What possessed me I cannot tell, but I returned in three or four days. Antonio was angry because I was so restless and ill at ease in Naples. I let him have no peace till he brought me back to Mergellina—I felt sure that something had happened. When I reached home, I learned that lady Roth had fled with the child, and that no tidings could be gathered of how or when or whither she had gone. I do not remember the events of the next few hours. I was as one insane. It seemed to me that I was guilty of having helped to bring this misery on them.

"As I opened a box I found a letter with Lord Roth's name on the cover; I knew that it was left there by her. She did not want him to have the knowledge of her flight too soon; so she left the letter for me to give him when I returned from Naples. She told him in the letter that she had sailed in a little barque called the *Eloisa*—Antonio's father was captain and owner of it. She told him she was going to Marseilles, and then to Paris; that although they might never be more than strangers again, she forgave him the wrong he had done her, and would restore the child to him either then or at any future time if he should desire it. I stayed while he read the letter, and I saw the wild joy in his eyes when he cried out: 'Thank Heaven, I have found my son!'

"His son! Even then, after his sin against his patient wife, and her noble offer of pardon, he thought only of his son. I told you that I believed he hated her; he was punished for that too—bitterly. The letter came into his hands sooner than Lady Roth expected. He told me he should start at once by the land route for Marseilles. He would arrive before the barque came in—he would bring them both home again, his wife and child.

"He said that to me; there was no one else with him just then, and it was a relief to him to speak. He wrote a note telling his cousin, Miss Berney, whither and why he was gone; he left it with me and started immediately—never doubting that Lady Roth would return to his roof if he desired her to do so. When had the meek lady ever dared to oppose his lightest word?

"He went—full of confident happiness. Three weeks later he came back, the wreck of himself—alone! He said no word—we did not wish him to tell us the fearful tale. The news had come before he returned—to the Berneys at Naples—to us servants at the villa on the bay of Mergellina—to Antonio old Mariotta's son. The barque *Eloisa* had foundered in a storm off Cape Corso, and every soul had perished. Even now, at this distance of years, I dare not recall my agony. Lady Roth was dead, and I caused her death—in my heart I felt that I was her murderer. Antonio looked to me for comfort, and wondered that I could not give it. He was sore distressed—distressed that his father should have found no better grave than the ocean for his gray hairs, and that the shipwreck should have put a barrier to our marriage. The voyage was to have

been the old man's last—last indeed!—and the barque was to have been Antonio's upon his father's return; by means of its profits he was to have made a home for me. Now it might be years before Antonio could make one, for he was very poor. We must wait—and Antonio was very sorrowful.

"Lord Roth dismissed all his servants, and gave up the villa on the bay of Mergellina immediately. I told you I had sent for my mother and my little son; and amid all this confusion and sorrow they arrived. I was in great trouble; I had no home for them, and very little money. Poor Antonio was broken-hearted for my sake. Lord Roth went to the Berneys in Naples. Miss Berney was engaged to be married to an Italian gentleman of rank. I think Lord Roth asked her to do something for me, knowing my situation. She was his best friend all through. She came to me and offered to engage me as her maid—she liked my ways, she said. I had no alternative, and I agreed. I went to Naples. I took a little lodging for my mother and child in the town. It was hard for my poor mother, but she never upbraided me. Miss Berney was very kind to me; she gave me many presents for my child, and she used to take him up in her arms when my mother brought him to see me, and pet him. She was busy just now with her *trousseau*. I wondered sometimes whether she regretted that she was engaged now that Lord Roth was free. If she did she never showed it.

"One day she came to me as I was sewing. She shut the chamber door, locked it, and sat down beside me. I cannot tell you the words she spoke. At first I was so stunned that I could only look in her face, as one turned to stone. Lord Roth wanted my son, to take and keep for his own, in place of the poor little drowned child. It was to be a secret only known to us three. My son was the same age nearly as his own. As yet no news of his loss had reached England. I did not know then why he was so eager to have my child; I know now. He offered to give me a sum of money large enough to enable me to establish Antonio in business and marry him at once.

"I could give her no reply then; I asked for a day to consider, and she left me. The night passed, and my thoughts were still in a chaos. Restless and sleepless, I walked the room till dawn, and still I could not decide.

"Then Lord Roth came to me. He knelt down by the table at my side and pleaded. How my heart would have throbbed in the days gone by had he thus knelt to me and pleaded so! He told me that he would be grateful to me always—that, if I refused, he should have a trouble so great that it would be more than he could bear. He would give me a dowry sufficient to make up for Antonio's loss. I looked in his haggard face, and at the gray hairs that had lately appeared so thickly above his temples. How could I say 'No' to him? Had I not helped to bring this trouble and misery upon him?

"I told him that I would do as he asked. He took my hand and kissed it when he thanked me. He told me that this secret must never pass my lips, save to Antonio, who would keep it for my sake. I was to give my child up entirely—never to make any claim upon him in any way.

"Well, I did as they asked. A day or two later Miss Berney was married. Lord Roth went to Rome, taking my boy with him, and a strange nurse to attend him. I saw him go; I held him to my heart close—close—for, oh! I did love him so! Then I went to Antonio's home, taking my mother with me. The money I had from Lord Roth gave us many comforts. Sometimes, in those days, I wondered why, if Lord Roth wanted an heir so much, he did not marry again, instead of taking the child of a stranger. I forgot at that time the compact with the Squire's little daughter in England. I remembered it afterward, and saw the falsehood that Lord Roth was acting; but I could not take back my word. I saw in the newspapers the notice of Lady Ellen's death; it was given out that she died at Na-

ples. I shuddered at the lie. No mention was made of the poor little heir. That silence was a lie, too.

"Lord Roth left Rome later on. I saw Miss Berney—Lady Santucci—when I went to Naples one day. She told me that he was traveling from place to place, and that the child was well and happy. That was the last I heard of my darling boy. In time my mother died. No other children were born to me; and when Antonio died I was alone once more in a strange land.

"I came back here. I was so altered that, of those who had been my girlhood's friends, not one knew me. I heard that the marriage of the Squire's daughter with Lord Roth's son was settled. No one but Lord Roth—not even the Squire—knew of the lie. I could not rest and see its effects. I went to Lord Roth one night a few weeks ago. I prayed on my knees that he would not let it be—this marriage, that was to deceive a good gentleman and a high-born young lady. But he was furious with wrath. He held me to my vow—he dared me to lay bare the lie of seventeen years ago. His anger was terrible, even to me, who had known him for almost a lifetime. I have tried to die with the terrible secret in my heart, but I cannot—I cannot!"

The woman had paused at times while telling her long story, but her hearer had neither moved nor spoken. Now as her wailing cry broke the monotony of her voice, he rose to his feet. She could not see his face in the dim twilight; she wondered at the calmness of his voice.

"No, you could not die and let so dark a sin be buried with you. Now, answer me before Heaven—who am I?"

In the stillness, before the solemn-spoken answer fell from the mouth of the dying woman, their very breathing was heard.

"You are my son—Oliver Kenn!"

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT SHOULD HE DO?

It was clearer to him now—the indifference of Lord Roth toward him—the distance between two who, as father and son, had lived beneath the same roof, yet were so far apart. "Base blood!" Yes, he understood it now, still it did not seem so very strange a thing to him. After he had known it for an hour, it seemed as if a dim consciousness of this, or something like it, had been always in his life. He looked back upon the past few months, and tried to persuade himself that it was a reality and not a dream. He wondered that so infamous a lie could have lived without discovery—that he himself had walked before men as Lord Roth's son, and yet no eye had pierced the deceit, or read his true name and history written on his face. Why had he not read it himself? Why had he not had an inward consciousness that his whole existence was a falsehood, a life-long lie? This was the strangest thing of all, that he himself should have been so blind, so deluded. Adrian Rutherford, too, who would have been the chief victim of this deceit—why had he not cried out, "this is not your son," to Lord Roth, when, after seventeen years' absence, he had once more welcomed his old friend back again, and looked in the face of the man who was to marry his daughter, Beatrix? Then he considered that this last did not seem so strange. How should any one recognize in the dark, stalwart man the child whom they had known when only three or four years old?

Lord Roth had foreseen all this. He had laid his plans, and worked them out skillfully. He had been very near winning a golden harvest as the fruit of his sin. But for Beatrix's having proved true to herself, he would have won it. A girl's truth had risen up strong, and stood between him and the fruit of his sin.

Yes; he could be glad now of her decision, which had seemed so cruel at the time. He was glad and content. Things were as they should be. Beatrix

could never have been his wife, even if she had returned his love. He thought of all this as he returned home from Ickston in the summer night. Only once did the consciousness of his own wrong rise up in all its bitter cruelty before him. He put it away—he could not face it yet. Even his brave heart quailed, and his brain grew dizzy, as he reflected upon his fate—his hopes blasted, his prospects ruined, his life a wreck, not by any deed or wrong-doing of his own.

He was sure of one thing—that it was his duty to set the wrong right in the world's eyes. He had been the instrument in Lord Roth's hands for fulfilling this marriage contract. Now that the marriage was dissolved by Beatrix, and that he had no tie to bind him to the man whom he had believed his father, the only course open to him was to leave the home to which he had no right.

He looked wistfully at the stately portals of Rothcourt as they loomed up before him in the darkness. There was no light but the faint light of the stars; the sweet breeze of the summer night came sighing through the trees and fanned his burning brow. For a moment he bent his head low above his horse's neck, with a weight of sorrow that tried his strength to the utmost.

Carlo Marini took his horse, and spoke a few respectful yet familiar words to the young master; and his hearer answered quietly, passing on through the hall and into the room which he used habitually. There was a shaded lamp lighted, and beside it on the table the book that he had left open before he started. His paper-cutter lay upon the page. He looked at it and stood lost in thought. It seemed a life-time since he had left it there. Was he the same person who had used that ivory cutter only to-day? Not to himself, but in others' eyes the same. Only a moment back his old servant had spoken to him as usual; he could not see the great change. That was hidden with all its bitterness in his own heart. A long interval elapsed, during which, with a calm immovable stare, he looked at the various things about him. Then his resolve was sternly taken. He would leave Rothcourt forever. He would find some work which would take him away to a new life in another country. He would begin his life over again—a life just and holy in the eyes of Heaven; and honest in the eyes of men. Of the years that were past, and of this summer, begun with such fond dreams, and ending with such unutterable sorrow, only a dreamy memory should remain in the days to come.

Having put his hand to the plow, there was no turning back with him. He took up the newspaper and ran his eye eagerly down the advertisement columns, pausing now and then in his search. He threw it down presently and took up another. A very short search sufficed. A little way down one of the columns an advertisement told of an agent wanted for a Brazilian mercantile company. He drew his writing materials toward him, wrote an answer, and then sealed and directed it.

"To-morrow," he said, "I will tell him."

Lord Roth lay back in his easy-chair, and looked out at the full splendor of the July morning. He was very feeble, this sickness had taken something more than strength from him.

A firm, steady step crossing the ante-room fell upon his ears. He knew the step and did not turn his head at once, although some one presently stood beside him. He looked round after a time, with a trivial, fretful remark upon his lips. Something in the young man's face riveted his attention. The sad but stern gaze that met his told its own tale. Lord Roth read it aright.

"She has told you?" he gasped, with white lips.

"Yes, she has told me," came the steady answer.

Lord Roth covered his face and moaned aloud. The other—turning his eyes to the sunshine without—stood silent.

"I knew she would—I knew it!" wailed the sick man. "But you will not tell it, will you?" he added, in a pleading whisper—the once proud and haughty tone was gone. "You will not lay bare my sin just yet? I am low enough in the dust, Heaven knows. Do not let all the world see my shame. I cannot see Philip Haughton's triumphant exultation when he learns it. He will have my home and my name, though I swore that he never should; do not let me see his triumph; wait till I am dead—wait! It will not be long. Spare me—have mercy on me!"

He lifted supplicating hands to the younger man, whose stern face showed no signs of deviating from his purpose, whatever it might be—showed no softening as the tones of piteous agony fell upon his ears.

It seemed to Oliver Kenn himself that he was very hard, very merciless in his strength. Yesterday he had turned a deaf ear to the prayer for forgiveness of the woman calling herself his mother. He had not heeded her outstretched hands when she cried after him as he left her. Now he looked on the face of the miserable man whose pride was in the dust, and made answer pitilessly:

"Mr. Rutherford must know it, and all the world must know it. It is time this lie was ended."

"Adrian Rutherford! Great Heaven! it was for his gold I did this thing. He shall not know it—I say he shall not!" cried Lord Roth, wildly, the old ungovernable wrath, the mad passions rising above the feebleness and pain. "Oliver Kenn, the day he knows it I shall die."

Oliver Kenn looked down at the agonized face, with a mixture of scorn and pity in his own.

"Through your own act of sin and folly you lost the son who should be standing where I stand now," he answered, bitterly; "and, not accepting his death as the just punishment of that sin, you sought to work out your own ends by committing a yet deeper sin. You would have stood by and seen me marry Beatrix Rutherford—nay, urged the marriage by every means in your power—she and her father believing me to be your rightful son and heir. You would have let me take the inheritance that will belong of right to your cousin, Philip Haughton, after your death. You would have made my whole life a glaring lie, a wanton deceit; and yet you look in my face, and ask me to keep the sin hidden from the world. I dare not. Beatrix Rutherford is banished by her father because he is displeased that she refused Lord Roth's son; she will be forgiven and welcomed back when it is known that the rejected suitor is Oliver Kenn."

"Then let it be known!" came the fierce and dogged reply. "Let it be so! Publish it on the housetops! Tell them all—Adrian Rutherford, my oldest friend—Philip Haughton, my bitterest enemy—all the world! Let them come, I say, to triumph and rejoice and to despise me! I am rightly punished. But they will not find their triumph complete. Something will be found wanting!" He set his teeth and clutched the arms of his chair, vindictive passion and despair gleaming in his sunken eyes.

"Something wanting!" the words rung in Oliver's ears long after he had left Lord Roth, and was pacing his room in sore perplexity.

He had read the meaning of the words in the sullen bitterness of the tone in which they had been uttered—they were but a repetition of the words spoken just before—"The day Philip Haughton knows it I shall die!"

Yes, he knew Lord Roth well enough to believe that he was quite capable of carrying his threat into execution. He would die by his own hand rather than meet the scorn and contempt which would rise up in the hearts of his nearest friends when they had learned his sin. The sin his pride had led him into—the fruits of that sin his pride could never face. Charlotte Berney had been content to live bearing part of the burden of the falsehood for love of her cousin, Reginald Roth; but the love of

others for him was not so deep—not even Adrian Rutherford's, his old familiar friend. He knew it, and, knowing it, would choose death rather than abasement.

Oliver Kenn, who had read the proud yet weak man's character day by day, knew this, and was perplexed. He was sure that it would be impossible for him to keep the secret for his own sake—for Beatrix's sake. Yet, should he reveal it, and as a consequence Lord Roth kept his terrible threat, it seemed to him that the erring man's death would be another weight upon his shoulders, already bent beneath their burden. He was in great perplexity, and could see no means of exit.

A day and night passed, bringing neither sleep nor rest to his troubled mind. Another day was born and died, and he scarcely heeded its flight. But the evening brought him a strange gleam of light where he had least looked for it. A chance word, overheard in a chance manner, placed a thread in his hand which he was to follow up, to penetrate a mystery. There was another sacrifice, another pain to be borne, but finally the peace and rest of which he had dreamed would come.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PRECIOUS CROSS.

THE supper was over in the servants' room at Rothcourt, and the butler, Carlo Marini, and the maids were gathered in a little group by the open window to gossip.

Oliver Kenn had been smoking on the terrace, and afterward he had wandered round to the stables; finally he had come to the back of the house, in the listless way of one who has no settled plan of action. He threw his cigar away and sat down upon an old garden chair. The voices of the servants talking by the open window came distinctly to his ears. For a time he paid no heed to them, until he heard a name uttered in Carlo's voice that riveted his attention.

"Are you cold this warm evening, Carlo Marini, that you hover round the fire?" asked one of the maids, laughing.

"Cold? I am always cold since I lay eight-and-forty hours lashed to a spar in the sea—eight-and-forty hours," repeated Carlo, pleasantly, yet with dolorous tones. "I don't think I've really been warm, even in the dog-days, since then; I think it partly petrified me."

There was a chorus of quiet laughter, and then the butler said, curiously:

"That was when you went for a sailor, Carlo?"

"Yes—I have never been since, you may depend; that gale cured me of my fancy for that profession," said the Italian. He spoke English better than his own tongue, lending the words a certain sprightliness quite his own.

"Then you were shipwrecked? Do tell us about it, Carlo," put in the pretty housemaid, coaxing him.

"There is very little to tell," answered Carlo Marini, warming his hands. "It wasn't in the Atlantic even—only a squall in the Mediterranean, off Corsica. Our barque was the *Eloisa*, bound for Marseilles. When I saw she was doomed, I lashed myself to a plank and trusted to the Blessed Virgin. They all perished, every soul but me; I was in the water eight-and-forty hours, and then a Spanish frigate picked me up and carried me off to Tortosa. When we started from Mergellina, we had a lady on board and a little child. The child got very ill after two days' sail, and the skipper thought it would die; so we put in at a little sea-coast town, where there was a convent, and left them ashore—the mother and child—or they would have gone down too with the barque. That was more than seventeen years ago—I have never been warm since. Maledictions on the sea, I hate it cordially!"

His hearers started suddenly, for a dark figure loomed in the doorway, and the voice of the young

master, sounding strange in that part of the house, addressed the story-teller:

"Carlo, come with me. I want you."

The Italian left the stove he loved, and followed his master through the passages leading from that part of the house to the other. When he had reached the library, Oliver Kenn closed the door and stood face to face with Carlo Marini.

"I want to know all that you can tell concerning that voyage you took in the *Eloisa*—more than seventeen years ago," he said, slowly.

A strange light gleamed in the black eyes of the Italian as he strove to read the expression in his master's face.

"I was one of the crew, signor"—he addressed the young man in this way in moments of forgetfulness; "the barque belonged to a Neapolitan trader, an old man named Mariotta Alfieri—he took charge of her himself. I had known him for some time, but had never sailed with him before, though I had been to sea four or five years then. Before we sailed from the bay of Mergellina—the bay is a few miles along the coast from Naples—a lady joined us, with a little boy. She came on board in the evening. We wondered a little at such a passenger's joining the barque, but, as she seemed to know Mariotta, we did not trouble ourselves—for the reason that sailors get accustomed to strange things. We put off at break of day, and sailed with a fair wind, for two or three days keeping just beyond the coast-line; we were to round Cape Corso, and so on to Marseilles. Just after we had sighted Civita Vecchia, the little child, who had been ailing since we sailed, got very bad. I don't think his mother knew, but I did, when I went into Mariotta's cabin and looked at him, that he was sickening for fever. I think Mariotta Alfieri knew it too. He told the lady that she must take her child ashore."

The Italian paused for a moment, casting a curious glance at his hearer, who stood immovable, betraying no sign of more than ordinary interest.

"Go on," he said, steadily. His firm lips were pressed tightly together; there were hard lines, telling of strong endurance, about his forehead and eyes. Carlo Marini saw it all and marvelled.

"Mariotta Alfieri knew the Mediterranean coast-line by heart. A little north of Civita Vecchia is a solitary bay, called, after the convent that stands on a hill looking down upon it, Santa Croce. Just after nightfall one evening we dropped into the little bay and put out a boat. Mariotta told the lady that they would receive her at the convent with the sick child, and that she would be able to procure a doctor's assistance. I was sent ashore in charge of the boat and her—it was but a little way. She sat in the stern, with the child wrapped in a cloak in her lap. I was a rough fellow, signor, but I was sorry for her and the poor little sick child. When we had reached the beach I drew the boat up and left it, while I accompanied her up to the convent on the hill, for I could not leave her so. She had a little bundle of things with her; so I took the child in my arms, and we went together through the deserted street that lay in the shadow of the hill. As we drew near to the convent gate I gave her back the boy—he seemed in a heavy sleep, only just moaning now and then. She thanked me, and gave me some money, with a little gold crucifix that she took from her throat—to keep in remembrance of my kindness to her child, she said. I put the bundle down, and pulled the great bell of the convent; and then I left her—for I dared not stay—I knew the skipper would be impatient for my return. I did not fear that they would turn her away from the gates of Santa Croce. I never heard of her again. The barque perished off Cape Corso, in a gale, with old Mariotta Alfieri and all the crew but me—I was a strong man then, sir, and I lived after being eight-and-forty hours in the water."

"Have you the crucifix now?" asked Oliver Kenn, quietly.

"It has lain on my breast ever since, sir," replied the old man.

"He did not tell that through many days of want and poverty he had kept the little gold relic with loving reverence, almost as part of himself.

"I want you to lend it to me for a little while, Carlo. I will hold it as a sacred charge, and return it soon."

For no one else would Carlo Marini have cut the black ribbon that bound it to his throat. He laid the glittering cross in his master's hand, and respectfully went out of the room.

When the closing door had left him alone, Oliver Kenn took the gold crucifix to the table, held it close to the light of the lamp, and bent his keen gaze upon it.

He scanned it closely. Yes, there it was, the first link of a great mystery to be followed up, or, if he willed it, to be left in oblivion forever.

Three initials in old Roman capitals were on the back of the crucifix that had been given to Carlo Marini by a woman standing in the nightfall with a little child at the convent gates of Santa Croce, waiting for them to be opened that she might find a refuge—three initials, "E. N. R."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MEETING ON THE SANDS.

THE tide was going out, leaving the yellow sands and the brown rocks glistening in the July sun. Among the rocks were little pools wherein tiny fish nestled and waited for the billows to come back and roll over them again. Pink and white and brown seaweed lay on the sand, lifting up feathery sprays to the sunshine. In a nook, sheltered by the cliff from sun and wind, yet open to the sea in front, sat two girls, one reading, the other with idle hands folded in her lap, and her face turned toward the ebbing tide. If her hands were idle her thoughts were busy. Presently the reader stopped and looked at her companion; an amused smile broke over her face, the smile ending in a laugh; the light rippling sound made the other turn with a quick start.

"Beattie, you were not listening—where were your thoughts?"

"Over the water just then, Sybil, in the old chateau where I lived with aunt Margaret," answered Beatrix, slowly.

"Was it so pleasant a life?" asked Sybil Dare, carelessly.

"I thought so then. When I first came home and looked back, I wondered that I could have been so happy at the chateau. Now I regret the loss of that sweet and peaceful life that was so free from the troubles of the world and wild emotions of the heart, like a calm autumn day after the radiant spring and the glowing summer have passed."

She spoke dreamily, half to herself. Sybil Dare paid scarcely any heed to the speech—it was a little beyond her. In silence she read to the end of the chapter that she was interested in; then she closed the book and jumped up.

"I shall go and call for mamma and the girls at the reading-room, Beattie. Are you coming?"

"Presently. I am rather tired, Sybil, but I will come and meet you."

Sybil Dare went off, treading the shingle with the elastic step of youth and health. Her sun-shade was held before her face, so she did not see a gentleman who was leaning idly against the gunwale of a pleasure-boat. He saw her, and something familiar about the slight figure made him look after her. One glance was sufficient—a moment afterward he turned to that part of the jutting rocks which she had just left.

Beatrix was leaning back against the brown rock, still idle. Her thoughts were busy again—not at the old chateau now, but under the lime-tree at the Reedes; hearing, not the plash of the waves, but a low voice speaking of a love that should live calm

and sweet through a world's tempest of pain and suffering, to arise unhurt and bloom to a perfect end.

A shadow fell at her feet, and she lifted her eyes. Oh, the joy that flashed out of them, the radiant gladness of the blush that rose swiftly to her forehead as she sprung to her feet!

"Mr. Noell! You here?"

"Yes," was the quiet answer; "I am spending my summer holiday among the rocks."

He did not tell her that he had chosen this little seaside place only with the object of seeing her perhaps once or twice—only seeing her, not to speak or to touch her hand. This chance meeting was full of bitter sweetness for both. Both knew it too well. Yet for the time they cast out the bitterness with the tide. It would return by-and-by, tossing and leaping in great waves toward them, but now it was far out—almost, not quite out of sight. Beatrix looked at the handsome face, the sunny gray eyes, the nut-brown hair beside her, and was happy. The summer breezes tossed her long, unbound hair about her flushed and happy face and downcast eyes, hiding their gladness as with a veil.

"Here is a letter for you," said Sybil, meeting Beatrix on the hotel staircase, and placing it in her hand. "I won't tell of you, but you are very naughty, Beattie."

Beatrix looked up startled at Sybil's smiling face.

"Yes, I know, dear, but I won't tell," and, with a reassuring kiss, Miss Sybil Dare floated down the staircase.

The Dares knew of Miss Rutherford's broken engagement, and a backward glance this morning had shown Sybil a tall figure entering the little cove where Miss Rutherford sat alone. When, after a prolonged absence, during which she missed luncheon, Beatrix returned, flushed and happy-looking, Sybil "put this and that together" with a girl's quick intuition, and leaped to a conclusion.

Full of other thoughts, Beatrix put the letter in her pocket, and forgot it till the evening, when a chance remark of Mrs. Dare's reminded her of it. The handwriting was Georgie's.

"I wonder what Georgie has to write about again—I had a letter from her the day before yesterday," she said, carelessly, as she broke the seal.

It contained but a few words, and Beatrix read them with shocked surprise. Lord Roth was dead.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CLEW UPON CLEW.

It was very sudden. Lord Roth's servant, entering his chamber one morning, had found him dead in his bed—the ancient bed with its purple velvet hangings, wherein many Roths had died, but none so suddenly or silently as this one. In the secret watches of the summer night death had entered the chamber, laid an icy hand on the troubled heart, and stilled it forever.

The funeral had taken place. Philip Haughton, summoned from his Cornish home, Squire Rutherford and Oliver Kenn had followed as chief mourners—after them, all the Rothbury tenants in procession.

To the world Oliver Kenn was the present Lord Roth—Philip Haughton, courteous and polished as of old, had acknowledged him as such; his cousin's secret had never been revealed to him—the two who only could have disclosed it had kept it well. Adrian Rutherford, too, had addressed the young man by his dead friend's title. Oliver Kenn had heard and answered in his grave way. He would keep the secret a little longer. He held one end of a thread in his hand; when he had followed its windings to the utmost limit, and read what he should find there, then, and not till then, would he reveal all.

Philip Haughton returned to Cornwall upon the day following the funeral. In the evening Oliver Kenn entered Lord Roth's private room, and seated himself before the old-fashioned davenport. He

held its keys in his hand; yet he sat long, with a thoughtful expression on his face, before he opened it. What tale, what long-hidden mystery, would its contents reveal to him?

He placed the key in the lock, turned it slowly, and lifted the lid. There they all lay—papers, letters, memoranda, books—in careless confusion, as the dead man had left them last. He handled them reverently, laying some aside, arranging others in neat piles, scanning all lest he might miss one that contained a clue to what he sought.

Hours passed, and his task was unfinished—when it grew dark he lighted the lamp and continued his search. It was nearly midnight when he closed the desk—he had replaced the papers and documents, reserving only three. One was a tiny slip of blue paper, carelessly written, and signed "Adrian Rutherford," containing a promise on the writer's part to give the estate called Free Chace, with all its revenues, to his daughter Beatrix on the day she married Lord Roth's son; the second, a little packet of letters written in a girlish hand to Reginald, Lord Roth, and signed "Ellen Noel"—fond, loving letters, written during their brief courtship, and bearing a date of two and twenty years ago; the third, another letter written in that same hand, but dated four years later. The last was signed "Ellen Roth," and on the outside was, "In the hands of Rachel Kenn, for my husband, Lord Roth."

The Squire was taking his after-dinner nap when a servant brought him a message. Young Lord Roth was in the library, and wished to see him in private. He said nothing to his wife and Georgie, but with unusual wisdom on his part, quietly repaired to the library.

"You were Lord Roth's friend, Mr. Rutherford," said the young man, slowly: "will you be mine also?"

"My dear boy," cried the Squire, surprised, "of course I will—I always have been your friend as well as your father's."

"I have some work to do, and I find that I cannot do it without help—such help as only a friend can give; I am going to ask you to help me."

"I'll do anything for you, Reggy," said the Squire impetuously.

He was always ready to plunge headlong into any, ditch if requested. It was his great fault, and had made him a few enemies but legions of friends.

"Thank you," was the answer, "but first I must tell you what it is."

Two days later Oliver Kenn returned to Rothcourt Hall from London, whither he had gone immediately after his interview with Squire Rutherford. "Now," he thought, "there is nothing for me but to wait."

A little man, with keen brown eyes, crisp black hair and whiskers, a gray overcoat, and carrying a black leather bag, alighted from the London express as it stopped at the little station eight miles from Rothbury, on a wet afternoon early in August. He gave the solitary porter a shilling to order a fly from the inn, and then waited with exemplary patience until it was ready.

"Drive to Rothcourt Hall," he said to the driver.

It was a long drive, and the horse took it leisurely, but the contents of the black bag furnished the tenant of the fly with occupation until the vehicle had stopped at the entrance to Rothcourt.

Oliver Kenn was in the library when Carl brought him in a card bearing the inscription, "Mr. George Gower, Gray's Inn."

"Ask the gentleman to walk in," he said.

He rose to his feet, his face becoming pale; the hand he extended to his guest was trembling. Mr. George Gower cast a swift glance at the anxious face; his own looked as if it were adamant.

"I am glad to see you," said the young man, in a

voice which he tried hard to keep steady. "Have you been successful?"

"I have followed your lordship's instructions, and have been, I flatter myself, eminently successful," was the calm reply.

Oliver waited, subduing his restless anxiety by simple force of will. Mr. Gower unlocked the black bag, and proceeded to draw forth certain blue papers; then he placed a chair near the center-table.

"If your lordship will be seated, I will proceed to read the notes and memoranda I have made with scrupulous accuracy," said Mr. Gower, complacently.

Oliver Kenn sat down to listen.

The story contained in the "notes and memoranda" was told. In the dining-room Mr. Gower was regaling himself upon cold turkey, ham, and Bordeaux, with an urbane smile upon his lips. But, even while discussing a tender slice of the breast, he found time to wonder a little concerning certain recent occurrences.

"Seems a nice fellow, that Lord Roth," he mused. "I think he was rather affected. Wonder what all this means? The name on the garment which they showed me at the convent was Roth. I'll make a note of it on my own account, and keep my eyes open. And I wonder—H'm! how far is it to Ickston?"

The last few words he spoke aloud to the servant waiting upon him.

"More than five miles, sir."

"H'm! I think I won't return to London just yet"—Mr. Gower continued his musing—"I'll go over to Ickston and take an apartment—say for a week. I should like to see the man called Reginald Noel, who is master of the School of Art, and who was teacher of drawing in a London academy."

Oliver Kenn was standing in the picture-gallery before the portrait of a lady, and looking earnestly at it. It was a sad face on which fell the rays of the lamp that he held—a sad face bearing the lingering light of its girlhood's gladness on the sorrowful brow. Calm gray eyes, touching in their patience, met his own; heavy nut-brown tresses adorned the low brow. As he gazed, a shudder shook his strong frame.

"It is the same face," he murmured. "Why did I not discern it before? The same face, save that this is sad and the other is still unclouded—not quite unclouded of late, I fancy, but brighter than this. Yes, it is true—not a wild fancy, but a stern, living truth. I have put my hand to the plow, and I will not look back. Yet that it should be this man! What mysterious power, what fate, has wrought this strange event? Beatrix, my lost, my only love, I will not forget the vow that I made when your head lay upon my breast! For your dear sake I will trace the sin to the bitter end—for your sake I will remember and fulfill my promise!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SELF-MARTYR.

MRS. FLAHERTY almost relinquished her faith in lemon-cake when she found it brought back untouched from Mr. Noel's tea-table night after night. The good lady was very troubled on her young lodger's account. He had come back from his brief holiday looking paler and more wearied than when he went. He was very quiet too. The sunny smile was always ready, but it faded too quickly, and left the troubled look. Mrs. Flaherty got into a habit of going upon little errands into the front parlor, and lingering to chat with the young artist. If she succeeded in making him laugh she rejoiced.

One evening, in the cool twilight, a horseman stopped at the white gate. Mrs. Flaherty was tending the plants in Mr. Noel's window. She peeped through a prolific geranium to scan the visitor.

"It's Mr. Roth—Lord Roth that is now!" she exclaimed to Mr. Noel, who was writing at the center-table. "I dare say he's come to see that poor, dear cross-patch up-stairs."

No; the gentleman's visit was not to the cross-patch up-stairs. He asked for Mr. Noel. Mrs. Flaherty ushered him into the little front room.

The two men had met before on several occasions. Mr. Noel courteously asked his visitor to be seated, and lighted his shade-lamp. As its light fell upon the face opposite him, his eyes, trained to keen observation, noted the change in it, the lines of weariness on the forehead, the almost perfect expression of refinement wrought by suffering.

Oliver Kenn spoke with slow deliberation.

"Mr. Noel, will you answer a few questions and pardon me for asking them?"

"Certainly, Lord Roth, if I am able," was the frank reply. The gray eyes were full of wonder.

"The questions concern yourself. Will you tell me, briefly, the history of your life as far back as you can remember?"

A slight color rose in the artist's face; he hesitated, as if in doubt what answer he should make to so strange a request, but at length he began:

"My earliest recollection is of the school where I pursued my studies as a child—"

"And that was?"

"A Roman Catholic school, endowed by and belonging to a convent in Italy. Later I left Italy and entered an academy in Paris, where I continued the study of painting which I had previously begun. After a time I came to England, and obtained a situation in a similar academy in London. While there I received the offer of the situation I now hold. That is all I am able to tell you—not a very interesting story," he concluded, with a smile.

"And your parents? You have told me nothing of them," came in tones of strange earnestness from the other's lips.

"I remember nothing of my parents. My mother died when I was quite a child."

"And your father?"

The artist drew himself up proudly.

"You will excuse my saying that, as I am at a loss for your motive in asking these questions, I must decline giving any further answer to them," he said, haughtily.

Oliver Kenn rose and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"You and I are almost strangers; but, for Heaven's sake, believe me, I am not trifling with you. I give you my solemn assurance that I have a reason for asking these seemingly strange questions. You shall know it in good time."

Mr. Noel looked into the sad face.

"I beg your pardon. The recollection of my early life is very painful to me; but I will reply as correctly as I am able to your questions," he said, frankly.

There was a long pause. Oliver still kept one hand on the artist's shoulder, as he stood by his chair. So standing, he looked intently at the Grecian profile, the beautiful mouth, the curly brown hair, with a dreamy gaze.

"Will you tell me your name?" he asked impressively.

"Do you not know it? Reginald Noel."

"You do not remember your father, then? Have you anything that belonged to him—anything that—"

The artist rose suddenly.

"Yes," he replied, quickly; "I will show you."

He left the room. Oliver Kenn passed his hand over his forehead. He did not wonder at Beatrix's loving the man with whom he had been talking. He thought with strange pain, how beautiful the face, how strong the will of this man was. Every curve of his features, every outline of his form, was such as to dwell in a woman's thoughts all her life. Oliver knew it—how well he knew it—how keenly he felt it!

The artist's face was very pale when he returned. "These are the only records of my parentage that I possess."

He laid them upon the table—a packet of letters and a worn morocco case—and then turned away to the book-shelves, as if he could not bear to look on while another handled the relics.

Oliver looked over the letters slowly. Yes—there was one more revelation in the history he was unraveling. The letters were from Reginald, Lord Roth, to Miss Ellen Noel, and the date they bore was of two-and-twenty years ago. Then he unfastened the morocco case. Did he know whose face it would reveal? Very long he looked at it—the beautiful face, the dark, earnest eyes, the heavy mustache, the curling hair—the face he long had known, but ever with a shadow on its brow, and the curling hair turned white; the same face, however, for all that.

Mr. Noel turned suddenly. The movement roused the other. He spoke slowly:

"Your father?"

"Yes—my father."

Then Oliver's gaze went back to the miniature, and he whispered softly, as to himself, "Lord Roth."

And again the artist replied, "Yes—Lord Roth."

A long and painful silence followed. The buzzing gnat came through the wide-open window and circled round the lamp. Still the two men looked in each other's faces in a silence so intense that each could hear his own heart beating while they waited for the something each felt was near. At last Oliver Kenn spoke, in subdued, but earnest and deliberate tones:

"And you knew that Lord Roth was your father, yet you kept the knowledge hidden, and asserted no claim to his name and inheritance?"

"I do not understand you. Are not the name and inheritance yours? I have no right—no claim—no—"

He stopped suddenly. A burning flush had dyed the beautiful face, spreading even to the forehead.

Oliver looked and waited. The other, after a long pause, said with deep emotion:

"My mother was not Lord Roth's wife—she was Ellen Noel, not Lady Roth."

"You must be dreaming," said Oliver Kenn, slowly.

"Dreaming! Merciful Heaven! could I dream upon such a subject?" was the passionate reply.

"If my mother was his wife, why did she die unknown in a solitary convent far from her husband, leaving her child to be nurtured by charity, and giving only to those who tended her death-bed the name by which I am known? Your mother was his wife—the Lady Roth who died in Naples."

There was still the crimson flush on his face. The gray eyes were flashing, and the words were spoken rapidly in a tone of mingled shame and anger. Oliver covered his eyes in silence. It was clear to him now. This man had been the victim of a false impression. There was no reason for him to suppose otherwise than he had. He had no single proof of things being otherwise. The few letters written by Reginald Roth to Ellen Noel contained no allusion to their marriage; they only discoursed idly of current topics, or when he should next be able to visit her, or like indifferent subjects.

To Oliver Kenn—in that brief interval—there came a fearful temptation. Should he remain silent? It was not yet too late. The secret was his alone, to reveal or too hide. He hesitated but for a moment. Then he looked steadily in the beautiful but humiliated face before him—the face of the man Beatrix loved.

"You are under a very great mistake," he said, gently. "Your mother, Ellen Noel, was Lord Roth's wife. She left her husband's home in Naples, unknown to him, because of a sin he had committed against her. She was traveling to Paris, when her child was seized with an illness, and she was com-

pelled to take refuge in the convent of which you speak. She had revealed only her maiden name to those who had sheltered her, because she did not wish to be traced, and for many other reasons. In less than two days she took the fever from the child, and, being very delicate, died—never recovering consciousness, even at the last. After her death a sum of money was found in her possession, together with the letters and miniature you have shown me. She had been heard to call the child Reginald before her own illness; therefore, when he recovered, he was baptized Reginald Noel, and placed in the school belonging to the convent. Later, the money she had left secured his entrance into a Parisian academy. You are that child. Do you understand?"

"Who has told you these strange things?" asked the other incredulously.

"Some time back I found the beginning of Ellen Noel's story, and I sent a solicitor—a clever and trustworthy man—to find the rest for me. He went to Santa Croce. He learned what I now tell you—he saw the garments your mother wore when she died. Some of them are marked 'Ellen Roth.' When the inmates of the convent saw that name upon them as she lay dead, they concluded as you did—that Ellen Noel was a homeless, betrayed woman, who had been wearing her betrayer's name, but had come thither to die in her own dishonored name. If they did not tell you this, I suspect they led you to believe it. Then the man whom I commissioned to find the hidden lie, traced you—the child called Reginald Noel—step by step through your life—it was not a very difficult task—until he found you here. The story of Lady Roth's death in Naples was a lie."

"But you? Who, then, are you?" came in the still wondering tones, for it did not seem to the listener that it was his own story that he was hearing, but the story of some one else—a very absorbing story—but still not his—one that had nothing to do with him at all. "How strange that my place in the world should have been here!" he added, dreamily.

"Not so very strange," answered the other. "I should have found you—traced you wherever you were. The only difference would have been—" He stopped abruptly.

"And you?" repeated the artist.

"You shall know. I must go back to the beginning, and tell you of the sin of the man lately dead—your father! Heaven knows that I would have buried it from my own sight, and from the world's, forever, in his grave, had it been possible."

Then, in the stillness of the summer night, Lord Roth's son heard the sin and sorrow of the past.

Did Oliver Kenn give a thought in that hour to himself? Did he know that he was acting the part of a hero? Or, when riding home beneath the hush of the stars at midnight, and springing from his saddle, to kneel upon the dew-damp earth, to bow his head and murmur—"I have kept my vow; I have brought her happiness very near to her, though she does not know it yet; I have not held my own life too dear—I am content to make it desolate for her sake; Heaven knows it; perhaps some day not very far off she will know too"—did one thought of his own nobleness even then enter his mind?

No—neither then, nor at any time past or to come. He had done the work given to him, just as he would have faced a legion in the battle-field, nobly, bravely. And if, as he knelt alone with his grief, a few tears, wrung from his suffering heart, fell among the grass and mingled with the dew upon its blades, was that any dishonor to the manhood he had beautified?

CHAPTER XXVI.

BREAKING HEART-STRINGS.

It was one of those strange stories that do sometimes get mixed up with commonplace, everyday existence. Some said one thing and some another when the story got abroad—that is, when the several versions of it became known. Only a very few knew the true version, and even these few, in their great wonder at the strangeness of the real romance, forgot to wonder at the grand conduct of the man upon whose head the fruits of this sin lay.

All did not forget. Squire Rutherford, his wife, and Georgie, who knew the whole extent of the sacrifice he had made, honored the man who had so nobly made it. Honored? They did more. From the hour when that man had come to tell him the beginning of the story, and to ask his aid in unraveling the rest, Adrian Rutherford had set him up on a pedestal, and in his heart worshiped him in his old impetuous fashion.

"You must forgive Beatrix when she returns," Oliver said to him, "for perhaps after all—" He was going to say, "perhaps, after all, the marriage you planned long ago may take place," but he could not trust himself to say it, so he stopped suddenly, and said instead—"For you see, even had Beatrix loved me, she could never have been my wife."

"Never have been your wife? Never have been your wife? My dear boy, she should have been your wife if you had been a sweep instead of the king among men that you are, had she loved you!" Adrian Rutherford cried, impetuously, as he clasped the hand of the man he loved and honored with all the warmth of his warm heart.

"I am glad you have said that," answered Oliver. "It will make me very happy to think of it when I am far away from you all."

The Squire expressed his astonishment.

"Away from them! Why need he go away from the friends who so valued and honored him?" They all cried out with a like voice of dissent. Young Lord Roth earnestly sought to prevent Oliver Kenn from going away. He would fain have him stay and make his home at Rothcourt, which must always be the better for the presence of such a friend. But Oliver was firm; he never swerved from his purpose. He thought how truly impossible it would be for him to live near the woman whom he had loved so madly, and see her the wife of another. For he could forestall the end of the drama now, though it had not yet come.

One morning Oliver Kenn rode to Ickston to take leave of his mother. It was a hard thing, for she was his mother, although they had never been anything to each other but strangers. In the narrow hall he encountered Mrs. Flaherty, whose eyes were red and swollen.

"Oh, sir," she said, beginning to cry, "I never knew till last night that she was my husband's cousin Rachel; and to think how I've called her and treated her at times! But how was I to know, and she so altered?"

Oliver took Mrs. Flaherty's disengaged hand.

"I want you to take care of her for my sake. Will you? I don't think she will live long. I shall feel glad to know that she is in such kind hands, for she is my mother."

Mrs. Flaherty ceased crying to stare at the gentleman. This was a strange version to her.

"I am sure you will do it for my sake if I ask you," he continued, gently. "Good-by. Do not forget me—I shall often think of your kind face."

Then he went away, leaving the good lady in a state of mingled grief and amazement.

Young Lord Roth was in London. There were many matters of business to settle with the family lawyer. Meanwhile Oliver Kenn's last days in England were spent at Rothcourt, alone. He had ac-

cepted this courtesy from the man who was indebted to him for so much. He knew Lord Roth would have felt grieved had he chosen to find another shelter during these last days. Carlo Marini was to accompany him abroad. The old man had begged with tears to share the altered fortunes of his master. Perhaps Oliver thought that the old Italian's company would brighten his new life.

It was his last evening at Rothcourt. He had been to the Reedes to take leave of the family. Georgie was out riding with Captain Dare. Beatrix had not returned from the sea-side. He sat in the old library with folded arms, while sad thoughts were passing through his brain—thoughts full of pain and passion, regret and gladness for things past—past to him forever. Georgie came in suddenly, without warning or announcement—the bright, loving girl who revered him so intensely.

He stood up, with a sad smile, and held out his hands.

"Dear friend, true friend!" he said, taking both of hers.

"Reginald!" she cried.

"Not Reginald now," he said, gently.

"Always Reginald to me!" she cried, passionately. "It has almost broken my heart to know that you are going; but I would not have you stay. You are doing what is right and best. I am so proud of you—so proud!"

He made no reply. There was a deeply distressed expression on his face as he looked into hers, glowing, sparkling, through the tears that she could not repress.

"I thought, dear Reginald, that you would be my brother some day; and I loved you—oh, quite as fondly as if you were my own brother—brave and noble fellow that you are! I shall never meet another man like you, but I would not have you stay here where your life has been so sad. Oh, I cannot forgive Beatrix when I think of it!" And she burst into passionate tears.

"Dear Georgie, this is the last time we shall ever see one another on earth, and will you refuse what I ask you? I want you to forgive Beatrix—be tender and loving to her as you can be, dear, for my sake." The low musical tones, falling on her ear, calmed her strangely. "I love her so dearly that my great happiness will be in the knowledge that she is happy. I shall think of you very often, dear Georgie—of the happy days we have spent together—of your home, and the dear old lime-tree. I think I shall see it often in my dreams; I shall think of the hours we passed beneath it; and most of all, after Beatrix, I shall think of you, dear little Georgie—of all your bright words and ways."

She raised her head to look on the face that she now saw for the last time.

"I hope you will be very happy," he said; "and I think you will. My heart is very sore at parting from you."

"Heaven bless you always and always!" she cried, passionately, as she kissed his face—the last kiss any woman would ever leave there.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SUN AND SHADE.

At home once more, and it is August. In the drawing-room of the Reedes, Beatrix sat alone, and idle. She had been reading; but the book was laid aside, and, with folded hands, she leaned back in the low cushioned chair. There was a pleasant light in the room. The afternoon sunlight was shut out by the closed Venetian blinds; a slight breeze stole in at intervals, making the heated atmosphere deliciously cool.

Beatrix was looking better, but her face had not the bright, unclouded look which it had worn when she returned from France three months ago. There was a deeper, sadder light in her blue eyes, a graver curve of the lips, a more thoughtful expression on her brow. These were the traces left by the "tem-

pest" which had passed over her life; yet she looked better than before the tempest came.

Into the shady room came Georgie, who hastened to Beatrix's side.

"Beattie," she said, very gravely, "Lord Roth is in the library with papa."

A scarlet flush rose in Beatrix's face; her eyes were bent upon her hands, which moved restlessly. She had not seen Lord Roth since that golden day under the cliff. He had returned from London only yesterday.

"And, Beattie, papa knows all now—the reason why you acted as you did before you went away," Georgie said, slowly and tenderly. Had she not promised to be tender to Beatrix?

Still no answer. The crimson had dyed even the downcast brow.

Georgie bent and kissed it.

"I wish you all happiness, my darling sister," she whispered, and went away.

Beatrix knew what was coming—what she had missed in all the bright summer days lately gone. This was the love she had thought of, but never before realized. It was coming to her now—it was at the threshold, and she waited. Her heart beat, her pulses throbbed quicker. The perfect lips were parted with the quick-drawn breath.

The moment came. He was at her side. No word was spoken—no word was needed. She rose and met him; the tender, loving arms embraced and held her close to his heart—his own—his bride. He bent his stately head and kissed a golden tress that lay loose upon his breast. Then he lifted the beautiful face—in silence still—and sealed the compact made in that same room more than twenty years before.

There were two weddings in the calm but glowing autumnal month of October. None could tell which of the two sister brides looked the lovelier—Georgie, with a damask color in her olive cheeks and her hazel eyes lit with happiness, or Beatrix, upon whose golden head the orange wreath lay so gracefully.

Adrian Rutherford's face was graver than it was wont to be as he stood by his two fair daughters to give them away. His thoughts were busy pondering that old time, nearly one-and-twenty years ago, when he had, laughingly, and in the very idleness of happiness, made the compact which lay at the bottom of Lord Roth's sin. If he had known then all that he knew now he was very sure that compact would never have been made. Rather would he have been contented to leave his little daughter's future fate in Heaven's hands, without plan or promise on his own part.

A little of the gravity spread to the faces of the two brides as each thought, in the midst of her happiness, of the brave-hearted true friend whom they would never see more.

THE END.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

On the stately terrace of Rothcourt Hall happy children play, knowing nothing of the sin and bitterness and remorse that had lived within the walls of the home now so bright and beautiful, once so sad and solemn. Not the heir to the old title, but the second of Beatrix's sons is called Oliver.

Lord Roth has not relinquished the pursuit he so dearly loved and excelled in. At times beautiful pictures find their way into the public exhibitions, where they usually find ready purchasers; for the simple subjects he chooses become, under his masterly treatment, both grand and touching. And Florence Rutherford has not lost her kind teacher, for Beatrix's husband dearly loves and is very proud of his wife's little sister, who bids fair to equal her master in genius.

Mrs. Flaherty kept the charge intrusted to her by Oliver Kenn well and truly. Rachel was not the same fierce-tempered woman now that she had been before the sin in which she had acted a part was revealed, but a penitent, quiet, yet cheerful person. She lived a year or more after that eventful summer, Beatrix and her husband taking care that she lacked for nothing that wealth could procure to ease her last suffering months on earth.

Philip Haughton never knew of his cousin's sin. He was drowned while boating, within a fortnight of Lord Roth's funeral. As he died unmarried, young Lord Roth, as next of kin, inherited his property.

Far away, in the grand and vast forest-land of Brazil, dwells a man who often, when the toil and heat are over, travels in thought over the great western ocean which lies between him and his past. As he lies with his face upturned to the starry heavens, things around and about him fade away. It is not the odorous air of the tropical night that is floating about him, but the glory of a summer morning in June, sweet with the breath of myriads of roses. It is not the dash of the waves on the shore that he is listening to, but the sweet music of a woman's voice, whispering soft words in his ear; and he is holding her close—close to his breast, in bliss too deep for utterance.

Now it is twilight, and soft melodies float in his ears—music so sweet, so sad, that he could listen to it forever; and a face shines upon him through the shadows—the face of a lovely woman in misty white. Then comes another memory—eyes weeping, and a voice whispering to him the words that are to part them. He hears them still, and oh, how plainly! He lifts the bowed form, and presses his lips to hers—"for the last time." And with this thought a great pain surges through his desolate breast, and a silent longing gleams from his mournful eyes, while he stretches his arms out full of passionate despair.

And now he hears again the great billows that come tossing and seething toward him, and he sees the wide waters that lie between him and that old life and those vanished scenes.

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